

open book

1: jesus 'opens the book'

introduction

FACILITATOR: *Jesus is always our primary example. He started his ministry by "Opening the Book" in the synagogue at Nazareth. While the synagogue was the worship center for his community, it was much more. It was the place for education, probably for local decision making and undoubtedly for debate and gossip. The Open Book ministry begins with churches but wants to move on to include education, politics, media and arts. If we want to reclaim the heart and mind of our nation from Secularism, the New Age and Feng Shui we need to "Open the Book" in these spheres of influence too.*

welcome

CELL: Of all the teachings of Jesus Christ, what has come to be most significant in your life?

worship

FACILITATOR: Invite people to share a favorite verse or story from the Bible and explain why. Thank God for who he is and for his revealed will in the Bible.

word

CELL: Read Luke 4:14-21 together then discuss and answer the questions.

Verse 16 makes it clear that gathering with God's people mattered to Jesus.

Does it matter so much for us today?

In what ways was synagogue worship like ours and in what ways does it seem different?

Jesus selected Isaiah 61:1-2 from the "scroll of Isaiah".

What does this say about the mission of Jesus and our mission?

FACILITATOR: *The 5 key themes for The Open Book ministry and approach are:*

IDENTITY (who we are, where we come from, why we are here, etc.)

FREEDOM

JUSTICE (what makes it possible, is life fair anyway?)

HOPE

FORGIVENESS

How many of these themes can the group find in Luke 4:18 -19?

As a group, take each theme individually and discuss why it is so relevant today.

CELL: In verse 21, Jesus claimed that the passage was true and relevant for their "today"?

Why could he say that? Can we say this about the Bible to our friends for our today?

FACILITATOR: *Read Luke 4:22-30 together and then discuss.*

Jesus told two Old Testament stories, one about Elijah and one about Elisha. Share what you know about these. (If you don't know much, then you can always read them out --1 Kings 17: 8-16, 2 Kings 5:1-14.)

CELL: What was his key point?

Why did this get his hearers so mad, they wanted to kill him?

FACILITATOR: *Think about why they usually liked to hear stories about Elijah and Elisha and how this clashes with Jesus' perspective. Jesus was clearly claiming that God cares for Gentiles (people beyond "his people").*

CELL: In the light of this, do you think The Open Book ministry is right to want us to tell God's story to everyone or is the Bible only for Christians?

Consider some of the issues/story lines that you might find on TV shows or in movies. Can you think of any stories from the Bible (or sayings) which relate to these issues? Share together how you might be able to introduce these stories as either a Christian counter-culture perspective or to affirm the attitudes in the entertainment industry where they reflect Biblical viewpoints. Which approach is likely to be most helpful?

Pray for one another that you might not absorb the world's perspectives, but alert others to God's views on contemporary issues.

witness/what now?

CELL: Find ways of expressing some of these themes to your friends this week. Make time this week a have a social to bring friends along. Use this time now to begin to talk, plan and pray about it.

2: creation - identity

introduction

FACILITATOR: Last week we looked at the way Jesus opened the Book to the people and the people to the Book. We also saw how the issues Jesus highlighted are very similar to the ones chosen by The Open Book ministry. This week we are looking at identity and what God's original intention for us was and still is. The aim is to understand more clearly our core values behind relationships. It is helpful to see the whole Open Book plan first:

1. CREATION - Identity
2. EXODUS - Freedom
3. EXILE/RETURN - Justice
4. NATIVITY - Hope
5. CROSS/RESURRECTION - Forgiveness

welcome

FACILITATOR: Give everyone a sheet of paper or card stock and ask them to draw a face which shows some of the things they feel about themselves. After 5 minutes, have them hold their face up and explain to the cell some of its features.

worship and word

FACILITATOR: The Bible is the story of God's relationship with human beings. This story is set in a cosmic context with God exercising selfless, awesome extravagance creating a life filled universe out of darkness.

Request that everyone shuts their eyes and then invite one or more good readers (who have been prepared to do this) to read Genesis 1:1-5, 6-8, 9-13, 14-19,20-23,24-25.
Arrange for the readers to pause for a 30 seconds at the end of each section.

Now ask the cell members to share their felt responses to this passage (this will probably be even more effective if people keep their eyes closed.) Encourage people to pray out their worship of who God is.

FACILITATOR: Have someone read Genesis 1:26-2:4.

Here we get a picture of God's original intention for humanity and creation.

Break up into groups of two or threes and discuss the following:

CELL ACTIVITY: What does this passage suggest about:

- God (start with v.26)
- God's relationship with people (v.27, 28)
- Peoples' relationships with one other, particularly gender issues (v.27 and v.26)
- Peoples' relationships to the animal world (v 28)

What does the Bible mean by "being made in God's image" or "be like us and resemble us"?

FACILITATOR: In the small groups, ask the cell members to write 3 things this suggests to them. Pose these questions to the groups also...

- What does the idea of being made in God's image mean to me? How does it make me feel?
- When this passage says that God put people in charge of fish, birds, animals, etc., does that mean we have unlimited license to do what we want with the world's environment? If not, why not?
- What does this passage suggest about God's (and therefore Christians') attitudes to creation?

CELL: Read Genesis 3 (at least verses 1-13, 22-24) together and answer the questions.

What are the wrong values behind human sin?

What are the effects of sin on human relationships, with God, with each other, with the world?

In what ways did Adam and Eve “die” (2:17) when they ate the fruit from the forbidden tree?

CELL: Pray for one another. Identify which original values were there before sin entered the world that are now distorted in your life and that God wants to restore.

witness

FACILITATOR: *In the light of these passages it is right for Christians to be involved in all kinds of “social issues”, such as ecology, human rights, mental health, world debt. It would be good for cell members to share their involvement in these areas and if they are not already doing so work out how and when they can become involved. Probably working in “interest groups” of 3-4 is a good way to do this. Spend the last 5 minutes praying around the issues of the “interest groups” and then encourage everyone to take action.*

what now?

CELL: This week take note to identify those around you who are obviously looking for identity. Pray for an opportunity to share with one individual, what God’s original intention for us was and still is.

3: freedom - justice

introduction

FACILITATOR: *This session we are looking at two more of the stories/narratives and their associated key issues, namely: EXODUS – Freedom and EXILE/RETURN – Justice.*

welcome

CELL: Share a time of great jubilation in your life. (i.e. a time when you won a competition, a time when a medical report came back in your favor, etc.)

worship

CELL: Read Psalm 46 together. Meditate on who God is in the midst of circumstances both joyful and sorrowful. When ready declare out your praise to God.

word

FACILITATOR: *Split into two groups for about 25-30 minutes, one half looking at the Freedom issues the other Justice.*

GROUP A: EXODUS-Freedom

Read Deuteronomy 26: 5-10 together.

(For additional info, read Exodus 1:1-16; 3:1-20; 11:1-12; 14 ; 15:1-13)

Spend 10 minutes reviewing your recollection of the Exodus story. It may help to answer the following:

- What was the problem?
- Who was involved in sorting it out?
- What happened?
- How was the problem resolved?

Discuss

In what ways does the story of the Exodus connect with the issues of freedom?

What were the forces which restricted the Israelites' freedom while they were slaves?

In what ways are we restricted in our freedom through our society?

How are we influenced by peer pressure, the media, advertising or fear?

To what extent do our true values manipulate us?

Freedom always brings responsibility. For Israel it was to worship God and enter and live in the promised land. Brainstorm some of the freedoms and responsibilities we have today as:

- a) Western Christians
- b) Students
- c) People in a democracy
- d) Healthy individuals

GROUP B: EXILE/RETURN-Justice

Read Nehemiah 9:32-37 together.

(For additional info, read 2 Kings 24:1-25; 21, Ezra 1:1-4; 3:1-6, Haggai 1, Psalm 137)

Give out pieces of paper and pencils. Ask people to recall an experience of injustice they have had to face and to relive how that made them feel. Next encourage them to draw a symbol or simple picture to express their feelings at the time. Then allow people to explain the significance of their drawing, both the facts and the feelings.

Ask someone, who has prepared in advance, to retell the story of the Exile and Return. (Or even find a children's story book (or children's Bible) of the account and read it to the group.)

Encourage people to make connections between their personal experiences and Israel's. What can be learned and applied for next time a similar situation arises?

Take two minutes for people to share one insight they have gained. Then pray with one another that people might live out what they have learned.

witness

CELL: Plan some sort of social event for a few weeks time for friends to come along to and use this time to plan and pray more towards it.

what now?

CELL: Think of a time when you have experienced injustice, remind yourself of a verse that God brought you during that time. Commit it to memory.

4: hope - forgiveness

introduction

FACILITATOR: *We come now to look at two of the most important segments of the Story of Jesus, the events of his birth and then his death and resurrection, together with their links to our human story. The earlier 3 narratives, from the Old Testament, provide an essential framework for understanding Jesus. Even the plainest descriptions of events in the life of Jesus are told by the Gospel writers with the big questions in mind. Who is Jesus? Why did Jesus come? Why did things happen this way? Where do we go from here? It is also imperative to recognize that we are given a story, not a dogmatic theology. It is a story we are invited to join. The aim of this session is to help people check where they are in Jesus' story. Are they standing aside criticizing, are they on the edge of the crowds, still with many questions, have they come desperate for help, are they disciples, if so pre or post resurrection ones? While most people will have some idea of the events involved in these two stories, it is amazing how confused we can become about them. So, don't be afraid to spend time checking out your knowledge base.*

welcome

CELL: In pairs, explain which incident in the life of Jesus you would most have wanted to witness and what you would ask Jesus about it. Give opportunity for whole group sharing if desirable.

worship

FACILITATOR: *The purpose of this time of worship is to help people respond to the wonder of Jesus. Invite people to choose a short passage of scripture or a song which is full of meaning for them about Jesus. John 1:1-5, 10-14; Eph. 1:18-23; Col. 1:15-20; 1 Peter 2:23-24; Rev. 1:12-18 may be helpful. Then ask people to share their choice, one at a time and ask people to respond with brief prayers. Conclude by saying together something like Romans 11:33-36 or Revelation 5:4-9.*

word

FACILITATOR: *Divide into two groups for 25-30 minutes so as to cover the two stories. There is no problem in only looking at one or doing it over two meetings so that everyone can look at both.*

GROUP A: Nativity

Read Luke 2:1-20

Ask each person to be one of the following characters.

- The Roman centurion in charge of the census in Bethlehem (Perhaps he has just been demoted from Jerusalem.)
- Joseph (Is he thinking of all the work he has lost because he has had to travel so far, or is he planning to sort out some timber deals while he is here?)
- Mary (Is she trying to hang on to her experience with the angel? After all nine months is a long time, and Gabriel hadn't warned her about the census.)
- The innkeeper (Roman rule has some compensations when it's good for business. It's a shame about having to turn away the young couple though.)
- A shepherd (No King David this one - shepherds were so despised that they were not even allowed to witness in court!)
- The angels of the Lord (Do angels look forward to a day out from heaven? Do they know what the message is to be before they set out, or is it transmitted on route? If they like the message, are they happy with the recipients?)

Take about five minutes to imagine what it is like to be your character on a dark ordinary night in small town Bethlehem. What hopes do they have?

(FACILITATOR: *Allow thoughts to tumble out in any order and cover anything from personal and family concerns to hopes for the summer, the next ten years, children, the nation. At the end of 5 minutes it may be helpful to have each person in the group jot down a few notes to capture the thoughts.*

If time allows, have people in this group pair up. One of the pair acts in his role. The other interviews him, as Luke doing his research for his book about Jesus. "Luke" keeps a few notes on "his" character. Then reverse roles.)

Finally move on to the time when the news is out. People are very excited that a Jewish Savior has been born. How does this affect your earlier list of hopes? Do they seem more or less important? Do any seem wrong? Do you have any new hopes and fears? What difference has the birth of Jesus made to human hopes? Are you facing anything now that you need hope for? Share your reflections with your partner. Then decide together 3 or 4 perceptions that you will want to share with the whole cell and decide who will be spokesperson.

GROUP B: Cross/Resurrection

Read one of the following passages: Matt. 27:32- 50; Mark 15:21- 41; Luke 23:26-43; John 19:17- 30

In groups of 2 or 3 explore the following:

- What did it cost to forgive us?
- Think on this from Jesus' point of view, but also the Father's. (If you find this hard, start by imagining that Jesus is your son!)
- What about the price the disciples and the women (especially Mary, Jesus' mother) paid?
- What has God's forgiveness accomplished?
- Think about Jesus' words from the cross, "Forgive them, Father! They don't know what they are doing." (Luke 23:34)
- Think about his resurrection words, "The message about repentance and the forgiveness of sins must be preached to all nations." (Luke 24:47)
- Think about the way humans have forgiven each other because they have experienced God's forgiveness.

If time permits, you may want to compare the understandings you have reached with some Bible views. (i.e. Romans 5:8-9; Colossians 1:19-20; Hebrews 1:3; 1Peter 2:24-25; 1John 5:11)

What are the areas in which you need forgiveness or in which you need to forgive someone else? Make sure you address these issues.

FACILITATOR: *Regroup as a cell and share what you have discovered about the nativity and hope and our understandings of forgiveness.*

witness

FACILITATOR: *Talk together about situations and people among the cell, churches, campus, nations where there is the need for real hope and forgiveness. Then spend ten minutes praying for the people involved. Split into more than one prayer group if there are a lot of topics to cover.*

what now?

CELL: If there are areas you need to ask for forgiveness or you know you need to forgive someone else, act on these things this week.