

## Weekly Newsletter: 24<sup>th</sup> September 2024

### Reflection: Church in a Dialogue with God's Word

By Hannu Sorsamo (the full article is available [here](#) or contact [Liz@holyroodevangelical.org](mailto:Liz@holyroodevangelical.org) for a hard copy)

I must have been only seven or eight years old when my grandmother, who had become a Christian a few years earlier, told me in a very serious fashion that the Bible is not effective if it is closed. The Bible only works if it is kept open, she said.

In hindsight, giving my granny the benefit of the doubt, perhaps she meant that the Bible needs to be read. Perhaps. But this was not my takeaway from the conversation. Instead, I took her words quite literally. For a few years I held onto a habit of leaving the Bible always open on my bedside table.

As a grownup, I do not attach much significance to the physical position in which the Bible is being held. What matters is its content, the message, in whatever form it is conveyed – be it stone tablets, scrolls of parchment, a paper book, a mobile app, or oral transmission. The Bible matters to us because of what its message *means*. Over the years, I've thought more and more about how we engage with this meaning. How do we interact with the content of the Bible, this *Word of God*?

In my experience, in Western European cultures we mostly engage with God's Word either by reading it on our own, or by listening to someone else reading and teaching it. This is surely a good thing! However, both reading the Bible and listening to a sermon can be relatively passive experiences. It is quite possible to both read and listen without actually *interacting* with the text.

Of course the opposite can also be true: Being an *active* reader or listener can initiate an internal process in us- engaging our intellect and our emotions with the text. In this case, we begin finding connections between God's Word and our real everyday lives. This is what we mean when we say that the Bible *speaks to us*.

If we asked our pastor, I am sure he would like us to be a Church where each member personally engages with the Bible and where we are all active readers and listeners. But even if this was a reality, would we not be lacking something as a community if this was the *only* way we interacted with God's Word?

**Churches in Bamunka** (read this section in the full article - <https://holyroodevangelical.org/2024/09/24/church-in-a-dialogue-with-gods-word/>)

## The Church in the West

I have come to believe that a continuing communal dialogue with God's Word is the only sustainable way forward for us in the West as well – that is, if we want to remain faithful to God *and* maintain a meaningful connection with the world around us. We need to ask ourselves how God's Word leads us to engage with culture and society. What solutions does the Bible suggest for our very real problems and struggles today? Moreover, many of our questions, worries and problems are not unique to us but are shared by our non-Christian neighbours. Could the church be a place where honest and respectful conversations about issues touching people's lives could happen?

I have been trying to promote such a culture of communal dialogue in our Finnish home church. One practical application has been an open invitation to discuss the Bible reading and the sermon over coffee after the Sunday service. I've been facilitating these discussions, challenging people to voice their thoughts and gently guiding the conversation back to the topic when necessary. The key question is always: What does today's text and sermon speak to you as a Christian and to us as church? The key principle: There are no right or wrong answers, but be prepared that your views may be politely debated. The fundamental basis: This is a conversation among the redeemed. You will not be judged for your thoughts, opinions, or experiences.

It has been inspiring to hear different people voice their thoughts and questions. At the same time, I have realised how inexperienced we are in such conversation and how it will take an intentional culture shift to get there. On the one hand, we are heirs to the Reformation, believing that everyone can read and understand the Bible for themselves. On the other hand, somewhat paradoxically, few of us are readily able to express how we understand any given text and how we apply it in our everyday lives.

I am convinced that an open conversation is also hindered, at least subconsciously, by fear. We may be afraid to say what we think. What will the others think about me? What if I come across as lacking faith, or too liberal/conservative/high church/charismatic/\_\_\_\_\_ (fill in your own fear here)? Would it be safer to stick to the usual phrases and standard answers?

We may be afraid to voice our most genuine questions because we think we are supposed to have the answers. If our view of a good Christian is one who does not doubt or hesitate, why shatter the image by admitting that I have unresolved questions?

A while ago, I listened to a podcast in which a Jewish guest was asked why he thought Jewish people are better than Christians at debating the Scriptures. I found his answer deeply moving: Judaism is not merely a religion but also an ethno-cultural community. Two Jews may fundamentally disagree on their interpretation of the Scriptures but after the debate both remain Jewish. Christian communities, on the other hand, tend to be held together by shared beliefs. One joins a church based on what one believes. Disagreement therefore always carries at least an implicit threat of ending up outside the community.

Yes, the church is fundamentally a community of believers. As a church we are bound together by our faith in the risen Christ. But isn't there also something saddening in this analysis? In the worst case, is the church held together by a shared fear of not having the wrong views or saying the wrong things?

## What Would Jesus Do?

Could the church be a community of Jesus-followers bound together by our common desire to engage with God's Word, with one another, and with the wider community? Could we be a church where our questions

do not have to match predetermined answers? Could we be fostering a culture in which we can have an open dialogue with the Bible, a culture in which we can even debate and disagree without a fear of breaking our unity?

After all, isn't this precisely what Jesus did? In many instances recorded in the New Testament, he debated the Scriptures with teachers of the Law, with Pharisees and with his disciples. Perhaps we can grow more into His likeness in this regard as well.

## Home Groups

As part of the launch of our new home groups, Jon Gemmell is going to lead some training on small groups on three Wednesday evenings at 7pm **starting this week** and then on 2<sup>nd</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> October.

Jon will teach for 30 minutes and then we'll have 30 minutes of prayer. Due to challenges with the technology, **there won't be a Zoom option for the prayer meeting this week (and on 2<sup>nd</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> October)** but the training sessions will be live streamed on YouTube. We'll go back to offering the usual Zoom prayer meetings once the training is completed.

The training is for everyone and the topics are listed below. It's a wonderful opportunity as our new home groups begin to think about -

- Word Ministry in the local church and the unique contribution of small groups... **AIMS**
- Writing Better Bible Studies and Making Bible Studies Better... **MATERIAL**
- The Messy Draw of Bible Study Tips and Tricks... **HOW TO STUFF**

Our new home groups will begin on **Wednesday 9<sup>th</sup> October** and will meet on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Wednesdays of the month. Prayer meetings will take place on 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> (if there is one) Wednesdays.

Please contact Liz ([Liz@holyroodevangelical.org](mailto:Liz@holyroodevangelical.org)) if you would like to join a home group or if you're not sure what home group you're in.

## Holiday Club – We Need Plastic Bottles!

The Word of Life team have asked us to collect plastic bottles for the Holiday Club in October. Please can you bring any empty 1 or 2 litre plastic bottles and leave them in the box in the church foyer over the next couple of week. Thank you!

## Handel's Messiah – 2<sup>nd</sup> January

Anncris is organising a trip to hear Handel's Messiah at the Usher Hall on Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> January at 12pm. The Edinburgh Royal Choral Union will be performing it for the 137th time! Please let Anncris ([anncris@gmail.com](mailto:anncris@gmail.com)) know by Friday 25<sup>th</sup> October if you would like tickets. Everyone is welcome!

## Women's Discipleship at HEC



The Ladies' Bible Studies have started back again and we're meeting on **Thursday mornings at 10.30am** in the church. Come along as we look at some of the conversations Jesus had with people in the gospels and what we can learn from them, it promises to be a great study!

We'll run for six weeks until Thursday 31<sup>st</sup> October (taking Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> October off). Speak to Norma or Liz for more details or if you have any questions.

## Release International – If Prison Walls Could Speak

The Artless Theatre Company are performing *If Prison Walls Could Speak* at 7.30pm in Charlotte Chapel on Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> October. The play tells the story of Release International's associate ministry worker Petr Jasek, who was imprisoned in Sudan for more than a year for his work supporting persecuted Christians. It is a really powerful production and tickets are available [here](#).

## Book Group – Change of Date

The book group will now meet on **12<sup>th</sup> October** (and not 28<sup>th</sup> September) at 3.30pm and we will be reading Max Lucado's *Anxious for Nothing*, as recommended by David Nixon. For further details please speak to Anncri (anncrisr@gmail.com)

## Church Calendar

For your info and prayers:

- Wednesday: Home Group Training (live streamed) at 7pm followed by the Prayer Meeting, refreshments served from 6.45pm
- Thursday:
  - Ladies' Bible Studies at 10.30am in the church
  - Session Meeting at 7pm in person
- Sunday:
  - Morning service at 10.30am – Joe Barnard preaching (live streamed)
  - Evening service at 6pm – Joe Barnard preaching (live streamed)
- Monday:
  - Baby and Toddler Group at 10am
  - Co-ordination Group at 7pm (on Zoom)



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