

09. Does God speak to us today?



BIBLE STORY / REFERENCE

1 Samuel 3:1-23

Hebrews 1:1-2

John 10:2-4

Note to leaders: Some biblical examples of God speaking through the Bible can be found in Luke 4:16-21 (Jesus reads from Isaiah in the Temple) and Acts 8:26-40 (Philip explains the Scriptures to the Ethiopian eunuch)



AIMS

To help the children understand some of the ways God speaks to us – that he speaks through the Bible and that when we trust in Jesus we have the Holy Spirit to teach us and guide us.

To encourage the children to be open to listen to what God is saying.

God spoke to people in the Bible, and he still speaks to people today. As we get to know God, we can learn to listen and to recognise his voice.



PREP FOR LEADERS

Read the Bible verses for today and reflect:

- What do these verses teach us about how God speaks?
- When have you heard God speak to you? (If you can think of an example of God speaking to you through the Bible, that will be helpful for the session.)
- How can we learn to listen to God, and to recognise God's voice? Take some time to pray for your group.



GAMES / INTRO ACTIVITIES

Choose one or more of the following activities to introduce today's theme:

▶ The Masked Singer

You will need: equipment to play video

If you have time while the children are eating lunch or a snack, you might want to play this short excerpt from the TV show "The Masked Singer":
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6VVCE0QjWfk>

It is a singing competition where celebrities dress in elaborate costumes. Part of the fun is trying to guess who

the celebrities are just by hearing their voices and piecing together clues that are gradually revealed as the series progresses.

▶ Wordsearch

You will need: printouts from additional document: Wordsearch, pencils or pens

Get the children to find the words from 1 Samuel 3:10 in the wordsearch: Samuel replied, "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening."

▶ Guess The Voice Game

Have all the children gathered at one end of the room and choose one child to go and sit at the other end with their back to the others. Choose one child to call out the name of the child who is at the opposite end of the room,

(continued overleaf)

trying to disguise their voice. The child at the opposite end of the room has to try to identify who was speaking. Once they have worked it out you can choose a different child to take their place as the guesser.

▶ Pass The Message Game

You will need: pen and paper

Have the children sit in a circle. Choose one person to start the game by coming up with a short message – just one sentence. They whisper it into the ear of the person on their left, then that person whispers it to the person on their left, and the message travels round the whole circle. Each person is only allowed to whisper the message once so if the person receiving the message is not sure what was said, encourage them to do their best to pass on what they heard even if it sounds strange. When the message reaches the last person, get them to say it out loud and compare it with the original message. You can then choose another person to start again with a new message.

Finish by getting someone to write a message on a piece of paper and then pass it round the circle for everyone to read. Comment on the fact that the message was passed on much more accurately in this way than when it was passed on by whispering.

▶ Blindfold Challenge

You will need: blindfold, equipment to set out an obstacle course or tape to mark out a course on the floor

Before the children arrive, set out a simple obstacle course with chairs etc. or mark out a course on the floor with tape.

Ask for a volunteer to attempt the obstacle course while blindfolded and another volunteer to guide them through the course.

Once the child is blindfolded and ready at the start of the obstacle course, the person who is guiding them can give them instructions to lead them through the course. They may only guide them by speaking to them, not by touching them.

Quietly choose a couple of other children whose task is to call out the wrong directions to the person attempting the challenge and to try to distract them from the voice they are meant to be listening to. (Make sure that a leader is on hand to stop the child if they are about to walk into a wall or hurt themselves in some other way.)

Once the child has completed the challenge, ask them what it was like to try to listen to one voice and follow those directions when there were other voices trying to confuse them.

? INTRO TO QUESTION

Today we are going to look at two questions about God speaking or communicating. The first one came from an SU Scotland weekend away, and the second one came from a child at a school in Edinburgh.

- **How can God communicate with everyone if he's so far away?**
- **If God spoke to people in the Bible, why doesn't he speak today?**

These are both fantastic questions. Let's start by looking in the Bible at an example of God speaking to someone.

EXPLORING THE BIBLE

▶ Samuel's Story

Choose one of the methods below to share the story of Samuel.

Video

You will need: equipment to play video

This short video from Saddleback Kids tells the story of Samuel in under three minutes: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P13ulsFW70A&t=>

Drama

You will need: simple costumes for Samuel and Eli (for example, a headdress or robe. If you have a white wig or beard, you could use this for Eli)

We can read about Samuel in the Old Testament of the Bible. The part of his story we're thinking about today took place when he was a young boy. Samuel lived in the Tabernacle, the place where people went to worship God, and he helped Eli, the priest, with his work.

One night something very exciting happened to Samuel.

Choose children to be Samuel and Eli and give them their costumes. Get them to act out the story as you tell it. Have another leader ready to play the part of God's voice by reading the words marked in bold.

Samuel and Eli were both asleep in the Tabernacle, when suddenly Samuel was woken up by a voice calling his name.

Samuel, Samuel.

Samuel thought it must be Eli calling him, so he went to Eli and asked what he wanted.

Eli had been asleep, but he

woke up and was confused by what Samuel said. He hadn't called Samuel. He told Samuel he must have imagined it and to go back to bed, so Samuel did.

But, just as he was drifting off to sleep, the voice came again.

Samuel, Samuel.

"I definitely heard Eli call this time," he thought, so he went to see what Eli wanted. "What is it?" he asked Eli.

Eli woke up again and told Samuel, "I didn't call you. Go back to bed." It must have been pretty annoying to keep getting woken up like that.

Samuel went back to bed. But just as he was drifting off to sleep the voice came again.

Samuel, Samuel.

Once again, he went to Eli to ask him what he wanted, and again Eli said that he hadn't called Samuel.

Then Eli realised what could be happening. Maybe it was God speaking to Samuel!

He told Samuel this and said to go back to bed, but if the voice spoke again to say "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening."

So Samuel went back to bed and sure enough the voice spoke again.

Samuel, Samuel.

So Samuel replied, "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening."

And God spoke to Samuel. He gave him a message to pass on to Eli. It was a difficult message. God was saying that he wasn't happy with the way Eli was bringing up his sons. They were doing bad things and Eli wasn't stopping them.

In the morning Eli asked Samuel what God had said, so Samuel told him the message. Eli realised that the words were true and that what Samuel was

saying must have come from God.

That was the first time Samuel heard God speak to him, but, as he grew up, he became really good at listening to God and he became known as a prophet; someone who hears God speak and passes his messages on to others.

▶ **Does God speak to us today?**

You will need: Bible or printout from additional document: Bible verses

There are many times in the Bible when we read about God speaking to people, and some of them are quite dramatic. (If you used Session 5 of One Big Question, you could refer to God speaking to Moses from the burning bush as another example.) **Sometimes we can wonder why God doesn't speak to us like that today.**

The first thing to remember is that the events we read about in the Bible took place over thousands of years. It can seem like God was speaking to people in dramatic ways all the time, but actually there were long times when it seemed like God was silent.

Read 1 Samuel 3:1

At the time when God spoke to Samuel, it was something unusual. It wasn't something that happened every day.

As Samuel grew up though, he learned to hear God's voice more and more. He was a prophet; someone who was able to hear from God and pass on his messages to the people. There were several other prophets the Bible tells us about too.

But what about today?

Christians believe that God can still speak to people today. It's not usually in a voice we can hear in the way that Samuel

did or the way that you can hear my voice just now, but there are ways God can speak to us.

The main way is through the Bible. Christians believe it is God's Word, the way God communicates with us. It teaches us about who God is so that we can know him and be in relationship with him, and it helps us to know how he wants us to live. Sometimes when we read the Bible it seems as if it is speaking right to us and to our situation. (If possible, give an example of a time when God has spoken to you through the Bible. If you have time, you could also refer to one of the examples given in the leader's note at the start of this session.)

(If you used sessions 2-3 of One Big Question, refer back to those and the idea that God's creation can show us something of what he is like. That's another way God speaks.)

Read Hebrews 1:1-2a

Christians believe that Jesus is God's Son, and that the best and the ultimate way God speaks is through Jesus. We can discover who God is and how he wants us to live as we read about Jesus in the Bible, but also, when we put our trust in Jesus, he sends his Holy Spirit to live inside us to teach us and to guide us.

One of the questions we're looking at today asked about how God can communicate when he's so far away. Sometimes it can seem as if God is far away because we can't see him, but Christians would say that he's not far away at all. If we know and trust Jesus, he's right there with us – his Spirit is living inside us!

What do you think about that? How does it make you feel?

It's exciting to think that God might want to speak to us, but that doesn't mean it's always easy to know when God is speaking to us or what he is saying. Sometimes the problem is not that God isn't speaking; it is that we aren't listening! But if we learn to listen like Samuel did, we can get better at hearing and recognising God's voice.

When you hear the voice of a close friend or family member, how do you know that it's them?

You recognise their voice because you've got so used to hearing it.

Jesus spoke about it, using an image of him being like a shepherd and his followers like sheep.

Read John 10:2-4

The sheep know the shepherd's voice and they follow him. As we read the Bible and pray more, we can get to know God's voice more too. One thing we know is that when God speaks to us in other ways, it never goes against what he has already said to us in the Bible.

The Additional Ideas section contains some suggestions of plans to encourage the children in daily Bible reading.

Depending on your group, you may feel it is appropriate to suggest this now or you may like to wait until they have covered Sessions 11 and 12 which cover questions about the Bible.



REFLECT & RESPOND

► Bookmark Activity

You will need: bookmarks (printed on card from additional

document: Bookmark), colouring pens or pencils, equipment to play music/video (optional)

Give each child a bookmark and encourage them to colour it in and to take it home. If they have a Bible, they could use it in that, as a reminder to listen to what God is saying when they read it.

If you don't have time to let the children colour it in at the group, you could give them one to take home and encourage them to do it later.

This song, "God Speaks" by Emu Music ties in well with the theme: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t5wRCWIdvXU>

You could play it while the children are colouring in their bookmarks or sing it together to end the session.

Lead the children in prayer, asking God to help them to know him more and to learn to recognise his voice.



ADDITIONAL IDEAS

► Daily Bible Reading

You will need: copies of Mark's Gospel or Luke's Gospel, Bible reading plans from additional document: Through Mark's Gospel in 80 Days or Luke in 67 Days

Depending on the stage your group is at, this might be a good opportunity to encourage them that they can get to know God more and learn to recognise his voice by spending time reading the Bible each day.

The leaflets in the additional documents: Through Mark's Gospel in 80 Days or Luke in 67 Days give simple reading plans to work through the Gospel in short sections. You could offer this along with a copy of Mark or Luke's Gospel to those who are interested. Make sure you check that this is ok with the head teacher first!

10. Why was he called Jesus and why was he the Chosen One?



BIBLE STORY / REFERENCE

Luke 1:31-33

Matthew 1:21

John 1:29-34



AIMS

To help the children understand what Jesus' name means and to discover more about who he is.

To help them explore some of the prophecies from the Old Testament that pointed to Jesus.

Jesus' name is significant because it reflects his purpose - to save people from sin. He was the only one who could accomplish this, and all through the Old Testament God pointed towards his plan to send Jesus.



PREP FOR LEADERS

Read the Bible verses for today and reflect:

- What do these passages tell us about who Jesus is and the significance of what he came to do?
- What is the significance of Jesus being described as the Chosen One?

Take some time to pray for your group.



GAMES / INTRO ACTIVITIES

Choose one or more of the following activities to introduce today's theme.

▶ Guess the meaning

You will need: cardboard sheets, pen – prepare in advance as detailed below

Before the session, go to a website such as <http://nameberry.com> and type in the names of the children in your group to discover the meanings of their names. (If you have a small group, you can also include the leaders' names; if you have a large

group, you can choose a smaller selection of names to include.)

Write each of the names and meanings on a separate card. See if the children can match up the names with the correct meanings. If your group is large, you could prepare multiple sets of the cards and divide the children into small groups to do this activity.

▶ Name Game

Choose the name of someone in the group, and get the children to come up with a sentence where each word starts with a letter of the name, e.g. Rebecca - Rebecca eats boiled eggs, crazily crunching again, James - James attends mouse-eating school.

(continued overleaf)

You can get the children to work together, either as one group or in smaller groups, and see what is the funniest sentence they can come up with.

▶ Who stole the keys?

You will need: chair, set of keys, bowl

Get all the children to sit in a circle and pick one child to sit on a chair in the middle of the circle. Place a bowl containing a set of keys under their chair. Get the child on the chair in the middle of the circle to cover their eyes.

Silently choose one of the other children to go and take the keys from the bowl. They must do this and then return to their place in the circle. Get all of the children in the circle to put their hands behind their backs so that any one of them could be holding the keys.

Get the child in the middle of the circle to open their eyes and give them three guesses to identify which child took the keys.

Choose a different person to sit in the middle of the circle and play again.

▶ Minute To Win It Challenges

You will need: slips of paper with the names of each of the children in your group, bag or tub to put them in, timer – you could use your phone or this countdown video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ebvtJCu33vM>, equipment for the challenge(s) you decide to use (detailed below)

Select some children to take part in Minute To Win It challenges. Three suggestions are included below, but you can find a huge selection of challenges here: <https://www.scarymommy.com/minute-to-win-it-games-for-kids/>

Choose the participants at random by drawing out slips with the children's names. If the child who is chosen doesn't want to take part, they can nominate someone to take their place.

Noodling Around

You will need: spaghetti, penne

You could choose one participant to race against the clock or you could choose two or three participants to compete against each other.

Give each participant a piece of spaghetti. Lay several pieces of penne on a table.

Their task is to put the piece of spaghetti in their mouth and then to see if they can use it to pick up six pieces of penne in a minute, without using their hands.

Oven Glove Race

You will need: small wrapped sweets (e.g. Starburst, Chewits, or small foil-wrapped chocolates), oven gloves, plates or bowls

Choose two or three participants for this game. Give each of them a pair of oven gloves and a plate or a bowl containing some sweets. They have to put on the oven gloves and race to see how many sweets they can unwrap in a minute.

Chopstick Race (or spoon race)

You will need: chopsticks (or spoons), small sweets (e.g. Skittles, Smarties or M&Ms), plates or bowls

Choose two or three participants for this game. Give each of them a pair of chopsticks, a bowl or plate containing some sweets, and an empty bowl or plate. Their challenge is to see how many sweets they can transfer to the empty bowl or plate in a minute,

using only the chopsticks in one hand. (If you don't have chopsticks, an alternative would be to get the children to do the challenge using a spoon held in their mouths.)



INTRO TO QUESTION

Today we're going to look at a few different questions about Jesus and who he is. These questions all came from children at an SU Scotland weekend away:

- Why is he called Jesus?
- What is Jesus' full name?
- Why did God choose Jesus?
- Why was Jesus the chosen one?

All the questions tie together, and thinking about the answers can help us understand more about who Jesus is and why he is so important.



EXPLORING THE BIBLE

▶ What's In A Name?

You will need: equipment to show PowerPoint (from additional document: What's in a name), or printouts of slides, or Bible/printout from additional document: Bible verses

The script below indicates when to display each slide if you are using the PowerPoint.

(Slide 1) **First, let's think about names.**

If you played the "Guess the meaning" game earlier, ask the children how many of them knew the meaning of their name before that. If you didn't use the game, ask if any of them know the meaning of their name.

Ask if any of them know why they were given their name.

We don't always think much about the meanings when we're choosing names today. Sometimes people choose a name for their child by naming them after someone special in their family; sometimes they just choose a name they like.

In the Bible, the meaning of names is very important, so the question "Why is he called Jesus?" is a great one. He wasn't named after someone, and it wasn't just because his parents liked the name.

In fact, God sent an angel to Mary and to Joseph, on separate occasions, to tell them what to name their baby and also to explain more about who he would be.

Read Luke 1:31-33 and Matthew 1:21 from the PowerPoint (Slides 2 and 3), from a Bible, or from the additional document: Bible verses

(Slide 4) The meaning of the name Jesus is "the Lord saves" and the angel told Joseph that Jesus was the one God was sending to save the people, to deal with the problem of sin so that people could know God.

Then we come to the question "What is Jesus' full name?" Does anyone have any ideas?

We often hear him talked about as Jesus Christ, but Christ is actually not his surname!

(Slide 5) In fact, back then they didn't really have surnames. Usually, people would be known by the place they came from or by their father's name, so Jesus was probably known as "Jesus of Nazareth" or "Jesus, son of Joseph".

Joseph brought Jesus up as if he was his son, but the angel told Mary that Jesus was really

the Son of God, so some people called him that too.

So, why is he sometimes called Jesus Christ?

(Slide 6) The word Christ is Greek and it means "anointed". When someone was anointed, they were marked out for a special task, such as becoming king, and oil was poured on their head. The message the angel gave Mary talked about Jesus being marked out as King even before he was born.

(Slide 6 part 2) In the Old Testament of the Bible we often see the Hebrew version of the word Christ, which is Messiah. All through the Old Testament, God promised to send someone, referred to as the Messiah, to deal with the problem of sin.

So, when we talk about Jesus as Christ or Messiah, it's not really his name; it's more a description of who he is and what he came to do.

The Chosen One

You will need: equipment to play video (or Bible)

That brings us on to the questions about Jesus being the chosen one.

If you played the "Who stole the keys?" game or the "Minute to win it challenges" earlier, refer back to those and ask the children: how was someone chosen for a particular role in that game?

In "Who stole the keys?" the leader chose people and in the "Minute to win it challenges" names were drawn out at random. In either of those cases anyone could have been chosen; anyone could have done the task.

With Jesus it was a bit different. It wasn't the case that anyone could have been chosen and it just happened to be Jesus, and it doesn't mean

he was chosen at random.

Show this short video clip (around one minute long), starting from 1:32: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YhZaFoJHgJM> Alternatively, you could read John 1:29-34.

For hundreds of years, the Israelites had been waiting for the Messiah God had promised. The Old Testament of the Bible is full of prophecies that speak about him coming and talk about some of the things he would go on to do. Jesus was the only one who fulfilled all the prophecies, and the Bible teaches that he had been chosen by God from the very beginning to do just that.

Not everyone realised he was the chosen one, the one sent by God, but Mary and Joseph already knew, and when Jesus was baptised, John recognised it too.



REFLECT & RESPOND

Prophecies about Jesus

You will need: printout of the additional document: Prophecies about Jesus. Cut the sheets into slips containing the individual prophecies

Before the session starts, hide the slips containing the prophecies around the room.

Explain to the children that the Old Testament contains over 300 prophecies about the Messiah, which were all fulfilled in Jesus. They are going to look at just a few of them.

Get the children to find the slips that you have hidden. Depending on your numbers, you might want to limit the children to finding one or two each so that more people can participate. Then gather the

children back together and read through the prophecies. You could give the children the choice to read out the prophecies they found or to pass them to a leader to read.

(If you have extra time, you could write a letter from the name "Jesus Christ" on the back of each prophecy slip before hiding them. Once the children have found the prophecies, you could get them to sort the letters into order as a reminder of who the prophecies are pointing towards.)

The Bible references for each prophecy are included for information in case the children have questions about them or want to explore further. It's unlikely that you will have time to look them up or discuss them in any depth.

He would be born in Bethlehem. (Prophesied: Micah 5:2 Fulfilled: Matthew 2:1)

He would be a descendant of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. (Prophesied: Genesis 12:3, 22:18 Fulfilled: Matthew 1:1-2)

A messenger would prepare the way for him. (Prophesied: Isaiah 40:3-5 Fulfilled: Luke 3:3-6)

He would bring healing and freedom. (Prophesied: Isaiah 61:1-3 Fulfilled: Luke 4:16-21)

He would be rejected by his own people. (Prophesied: Isaiah 53:3 Fulfilled: John 1:11)

He would ride into Jerusalem on a donkey. (Prophesied: Zechariah 9:9 Fulfilled: John 12:14-15)

He would be betrayed by a close friend. (Prophesied: Psalm 41:9 Fulfilled: Luke 22:47-48)

His hands and feet would be pierced. (Prophesied: Psalm 22:16 Fulfilled: John 19:18)

He would be killed like a criminal. (Prophesied: Isaiah 53:9 Fulfilled: John 19:18)

He would be buried in a rich man's grave. (Prophesied: Isaiah 53:9 Fulfilled: Luke 23:50-53)

He would be raised from the dead. (Prophesied: Psalm 16:10 Fulfilled:

Matthew 28:2-7)

Ask the children what they think about Jesus fulfilling all those prophecies that were written hundreds of years before he was even born.

A professor called Peter W. Stoner said that the chance of just eight of those prophecies coming true was the same as if you covered the whole state of Texas with silver dollars two feet deep and then you asked a blindfolded man to pick out the one silver dollar that you had marked!

▶ Reflection/Prayer Activity

You will need: large sheet of paper (e.g. flip chart paper), coloured pens, equipment to play music (optional)

Write the name "Jesus" in the middle of the flip chart paper. If you are likely to be short of time, you could do this in advance. If you have more time available, you could let the children do it as part of the activity. If you have a large group of children, you could have multiple sheets of paper and let them do the activity in small groups.

Play the song "Only Jesus" from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mmchjC3-GFE>

As the children listen, get them to write or draw on the sheet around the name Jesus. They could write words they would use to describe Jesus based on what they've heard during this session, or they could write or draw other things they know about Jesus and what he did. (You could lay out the prophecy slips from the previous activity around the sheet of paper as these may give the children some ideas.)

Once they have had time to do this, get a leader to close in prayer, praising Jesus, using some of the words and ideas the children have put on the sheet.

11. Who wrote the Bible and why?



BIBLE STORY / REFERENCE

Psalm 119:105

2 Timothy 3:15-17



AIMS

To help the children understand some basic facts about the structure of the Bible, and to understand that although it was written by around 40 human authors, Christians believe it is God's Word

To help them reflect on why the Bible is important and how God can speak to us through it today

The Bible was written by around 40 different human authors over a period of about 1500 years, but it all tells one big story. Christians believe the Bible is God's Word and that we can learn about God and get to know him as we read it.



PREP FOR LEADERS

Read the Bible verses for today and reflect:

- What are some of the points the passages make about why the Bible is so important?
- When have you been encouraged or helped by words from the Bible? (There will be an opportunity to share an example with the children as part of this session.)

Take some time to pray for your group.



GAMES / INTRO ACTIVITIES

Choose one or more of the following activities to introduce today's theme:

► Book Game

You will need: selection of children's books, set of questions prepared in advance (as detailed below). If you don't have children's books available, you could print off images of book covers instead

Gather a selection of children's books, aiming to represent different topics and genres of writing. Include a Bible or a Bible story book in your selection.

Create a set of questions based on the books you have, e.g.

Which book would you look at if you wanted to make a cake?

Which book would you read to your 3 year old cousin?

Which book would teach you about the Romans?

Which book includes a poem about daffodils?

Which book would you look at to discover more about God? (Save this question for last.)

Place the books around the room. (If you are short of space they can be within easy reach of the children, but if you have more space you can make it more active by spreading them out so they have to run to the books.)

Ask each question and see which child can be the first to pick up the correct book.

▶ Story Circle

Have the children sit in a circle. Choose one child to start. They have to say the first word of a story. Then the person beside them has to say the next word. Continue round the circle in this way with each person adding one word. See how long you can keep going for.

▶ Story Cubes

You will need: either the Story Cubes game (available from Amazon etc.), your own DIY story cubes (free download available here: <https://www.funkidslive.com/summer-challenge/free-printable-story-cubes-download-play/>), or a phone with the Story Dice app (free on Android or Apple)

Let the children take turns to roll the dice to reveal a selection of symbols. Their task is to create a short story based around the symbols shown. It only needs to be a few sentences long and it can be as serious or silly as they like. You could either let one child make up the whole story or let them take turns to add to the story incorporating a new symbol each time.

▶ Consequences Game

You will need: pens and paper

Each player starts with a piece of paper. The players each write a word or phrase as the first step in a story and then fold the paper to hide what they have written before passing it to the next player.

The steps are as follows, where the words in brackets should be replaced by the chosen words or phrase:

(boy's name)

met (girl's name)

in/at/on (where they met)

He said (what he said)

She said (what she said)

He (what he did)

She (what she did)

The consequence was (what happened)

When the players have completed all eight steps, the pieces of paper are unfolded in turn and the players read out the completed, usually funny, stories.



INTRO TO QUESTION

When we were collecting questions for this series, one of the most common topics people had questions about was the Bible. There were all kinds of questions:

- **Who wrote the Bible?**
- **When was the Bible written?**
- **Why do we have a Bible?**
- **How were the stories in the Bible passed down?**
- **How was the Bible put together?**

Those were just some of the questions, so in today's session and the next session we are going to try to learn more about the Bible.



EXPLORING THE BIBLE

▶ What is the Bible?

You will need: small selection of different Bibles, either equipment to display PowerPoint or printouts from the additional documents detailed below, book box (optional)

First, we're going to think about what the Bible is.

When I say the word, "Bible," what comes to mind?

You could ask the children to share anything they already know about the Bible.

Point out that the Bible is a book, but today lots of people also read the Bible through an app on their phone or tablet. You could show them a selection of different Bibles to let them see the variety that is available.

The Bible is made up of lots of different kinds of writing.

Symbols representing the different kinds of writing in the Bible are included in an additional document: Bible symbols. You could print these to use as a visual aid. You could even have them inside a book box like these ones from Hobbycraft: <http://hobbycraft.co.uk/mache-book-24cm/6089291000.html> which you have decorated to look like a Bible.

If you want to make the activity more active, you could have the symbols hidden around the room before the children arrive and get them to go and find them.

Alternatively, you could display the symbols on PowerPoint. All slides for this session are included in the additional document: Bible PowerPoint.

It contains history, God's laws, songs and poems, letters and prophecy. (People called prophets brought messages from God to the people and we have many of those messages written down.) It was written by around 40 different people over a period of about 1500 years.

The Bible is one book made up of 66 smaller books. It is divided into two main sections.

Does anyone know what they are called?

The Old Testament and the New Testament.

Either display the Bible bookcase charts on slides three and four of the PowerPoint or printed from the additional document: Bible bookcase.

The Old Testament is where we read about events before Jesus was born as a baby and the New Testament is where we read about events after Jesus was born.

Show the graphic on slide five of the PowerPoint or printed from the additional document: Bible graphic, to recap the key information about the structure of the Bible.

There are 39 books in the Old Testament and 27 in the New, but they all tell one big story. All through the Old Testament there are clues pointing ahead to Jesus and what he came to do.

We said the Bible was written by around 40 different human authors and it was written over a period of about 1500 years, so many of the authors didn't even live at the same time as one another. Without God in control of it, how could it possibly all fit together as one big story?

If you used one of the storytelling intro activities, you could refer back to that. Different people writing parts of the same story produced some funny results, but it was a bit chaotic, and the parts of the story didn't really fit together very well. However, the Bible is different.

Although it was written by several different human authors, Christians believe that the Bible is God's Word; that God inspired the people who were writing it to know what to say, that even though

it was written a long time ago it still has things to say to us today and that we can get to know God as we read it.

We'll think more next time about how the Bible was passed down and put together in one book, but for now we're going to think a bit more about why the Bible is so important to Christians.



REFLECT & RESPOND

► How can the Bible help us?

You will need: Bible or equipment to display PowerPoint or printouts from additional document: Bible verses, paper and pens (optional)

Read out Psalm 119:105 and 2 Timothy 3:15-17 from a Bible, from the PowerPoint or from the printouts.

"Your word is like a lamp that shows me the way. It is like a light that guides me." (Psalm 119:105 NIRV)

(You could mention that this is a key verse for Scripture Union and that's why the Scripture Union logo has a picture of a light.)

"You have known the Holy Scriptures ever since you were a little child. They are able to teach you how to be saved by believing in Christ Jesus. God has breathed life into all Scripture. It is useful for teaching us what is true. It is useful for correcting our mistakes. It is useful for making our lives whole again. It is useful for training us to do what is right. By using Scripture, the servant of God can be completely prepared to do every good thing." (2 Timothy 3:15-17 NIRV)

These verses don't include the

word "Bible" (because they were written before the Bible had been put together) but in the first verse the writer is talking to God and says, "Your word." The Bible is the main way God speaks to us or communicates with us today, so Christians sometimes refer to it as "God's Word." In the second reading, it talks about "Scripture." That is another word for "sacred writings," and it is another name sometimes used for the Bible, like in the name "Scripture Union."

Discuss:

What are some of the different ways these verses say that the Bible can help us? (You could give the children copies of the verses and get them to circle their answers, working in small groups.)

Try to draw out points such as:

- It guides us and shows us the way
- It teaches us how to be saved by believing in Jesus
- It teaches what is true
- It corrects us and trains us

Briefly share a time when you were helped by something you read in the Bible, e.g. an example of when you discovered something new about God or learned to trust him or when a verse or passage helped you in a particular situation. If you have time, it would be great if two or three leaders could share an example.

Depending on your group, if you think it would be suitable, you could ask if any of the children have an example they would like to share.

► Reflection Activity

You will need: cards printed double sided from additional document: Bible Verse Cards

Lay out the cards with the sides listing emotions or situations face up. You may want to have multiple copies of the cards. Let the children take a moment to think about which one they most relate to just now.

Explain that the Bible contains words that can help us whatever situation we are in or however we are feeling.

Let them pick up the card they have chosen and turn it over to read the Bible verse.

Give them a moment to think about it quietly; then lead the children in prayer and encourage them to take the card they chose home and keep it somewhere as a reminder.



ADDITIONAL IDEAS

▶ God's Story Video

You will need: equipment to play video

This short video (5 minutes) could be used to recap some of the information about what the Bible is and the big story it contains: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dv8dHsxjLd8>

It includes the phrase, "Everything in the Bible is true," so it would be best to explain before you show the video that this is a Christian explaining what they believe about the Bible.

▶ Daily Bible Reading

You will need: copies of Mark's Gospel or Luke's Gospel, Bible reading plans from additional document: Through Mark's Gospel in 80 Days or Luke in 67 Days

Depending on the stage your group is at, this might be a good opportunity to encourage them that they can get to know God more and learn to recognise his voice by spending time reading the Bible each day. The leaflets in the additional documents: Through Mark's Gospel in 80 Days or Luke in 67 Days give simple reading plans to work through the Gospel in short sections. You could offer this along with a copy of Mark or Luke's Gospel to those who are interested. Make sure you check that this is ok with the head teacher first!

This idea was also suggested in Session 9. If you used it there, you could ask how the children have been getting on and encourage them again to give it a try.

12. How was the Bible put together?



BIBLE STORY / REFERENCE

Luke 4:1-13

Luke 4:16-21



AIMS

To help the children understand how the Bible was put together and to consider some of the reasons why we can have confidence that the right books were included.

Note to leaders: this session is designed to follow on from Session 11 Who wrote the Bible and why?

The different books in the Bible were passed down and collected together over time. The Old Testament was gathered together by the time of Jesus and Jesus often quoted from it. The New Testament was written by some of Jesus' followers soon after his death and resurrection.



PREP FOR LEADERS

Read the Bible verses for today and reflect:

- What do these passages show us about how Jesus viewed the Old Testament?
- How would you answer someone who asked how we can be sure we have the right books included in the Bible?

Take some time to pray for your group.



GAMES / INTRO ACTIVITIES

Choose one or more of the following activities to introduce today's theme:

► Jigsaw Game

You will need: jigsaws (you can either use children's jigsaws that will be fairly quick to complete or make your own by cutting the images from additional documents: Jigsaw Pictures into about 20 pieces each)

Prepare the jigsaws before the group by removing three or four pieces from each one and putting them into a different box/set.

Divide the children into groups of two or three. Give each group a jigsaw and tell them that their challenge is to complete their puzzle. Don't comment on the fact that they have some pieces that don't belong to their set, but once they notice, encourage them to work out how to solve the problem for themselves. Don't make it too competitive - once they realise that they have pieces belonging to the other groups, encourage them to cooperate so that every group has the pieces they need.

► Scroll Game

You will need: printout(s) of additional document: Isaiah 61 scroll

Before the children arrive, cut the Isaiah 61 scroll document into around ten pieces and spread them around the room. If you plan to divide the children into teams, do this with multiple copies of the document – one per team. Be sure to differentiate them in some way, e.g. print them on different colours of paper or draw a symbol on the back of each piece to show which set it belongs to.

Divide the children into teams (or keep them as one team if you have a small group). Explain that each team's task is to gather pieces of a scroll which are around the room and piece it together to find out what it says.

Ask each team to form a line and to do this as a relay: the first person from each team collects one piece of the scroll, when they return to the team the next person collects one piece, and so on until they have all the pieces and have pieced together the scroll. If you have used different colours or symbols to differentiate the sets, be sure to tell each team which colour/symbol they are to look for.

See which team can be the fastest to find all the pieces of the scroll and discover what it says.

▶ Odd One Out Quiz

You will need: signs labelled A, B, C and D, blu-tack or pins (optional)

Ask the children to identify the odd one out from each set of four options. You can either get them to put their hand up to vote for their chosen answer, or have signs labelled A, B, C and D around the room and get them to move to the sign with their chosen answer. Once they have chosen, ask someone to explain why they think their answer is the odd one out.

A: Flute, B: Clarinet, C: Guitar, D: Saxophone (C: Guitar, the others are woodwind instruments)

A: Italy, B: Canada, C: Spain, D: Belgium (B: Canada, the others are in Europe)

A: London, B: Edinburgh, C: Aberdeen, D: Glasgow (A: London, the others are in Scotland)

A: January, B: July, C: August, D: November (D: November, the others have 31 days)

A: Swimming, B: Football, C: Rugby, D: Tennis (A: Swimming, the others use a ball)

A: Red, B: Yellow, C: Pink, D: Violet (C: Pink, the others are all colours of the rainbow)

A: Metre, B: Kilogram, C: Mile, D: Kilometre (B: Kilogram, the others are all measurements of distance)

A: Peach, B: Plum, C: Nectarine, D: Banana (D: Banana, the others all have a stone)

▶ Pass The Message Game

This is included in Session 9 of One Big Question but it would also be suitable here.



INTRO TO QUESTION

As we said last time, when we asked what questions people had, we found that there were a lot of questions about the Bible. Last time we thought about who wrote the Bible and why, and we learned a bit about the different kinds of writing we have in the Bible.

Do a quick quiz to see if the children can remember the key points from last time:

- How many different human authors wrote the Bible?
Around 40

- How many books are in the Bible?
66
- What are some of the kinds of writing in the Bible?
Law, history, songs and poems, prophecy, letters
- What is the difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament?
The Old Testament tells about events before Jesus was born and the New Testament tells about events after Jesus was born
- Why do Christians believe the Bible is so important?
It is God's Word and God can speak to us through it

Today we're going to think about two more questions following on from this:

- **How were the stories in the Bible passed down?**
- **How was the Bible put together?**



EXPLORING THE BIBLE

▶ How were the stories passed down?

You will need: equipment to play video, printout of additional document: Bible bookcase or equipment to display it on PowerPoint

These are great questions! The books we have in the Bible were written over a period of about 1,500 years, so the Bible wasn't originally written as one book. The 66 individual books had to be passed down and eventually collected together.

Show the printout or PowerPoint of the Bible bookcase; you can refer back to it throughout this "Exploring the Bible" section as you are mentioning the different books.

First, let's think about how the stories were passed down.

Some of the earliest stories in the Bible, like the creation of the world or Noah's ark, would have been passed down by word of mouth and then eventually written down. Many of the later books were written much closer to the time when the events in them happened, for example, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, the four books in the New Testament which tell the story of Jesus, were written down soon after the events took place by some of Jesus' disciples who witnessed what he did, and by people who spoke to his disciples about their experiences.

The New Testament also contains several letters which were written to different people and churches during the thirty years or so after Jesus died, rose again and ascended to heaven.

When the books we have in the Bible were first written it wasn't very easy to make copies of them as they had to be written out by hand! This short video talks a bit about the different ways the books in the Bible were passed down, and it also talks about the discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls, which is when some of the oldest written copies of parts of the Old Testament of the Bible were found.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2AuDhWiO2D4>

▶ How was the Bible put together?

Now let's think about how the Bible was put together. Something people often wonder about is: who decided which books are in the Bible, and how do we know if they included the right books? It's an important question if the Bible really is God's Word!

There wasn't a single point when people sat down to decide which books should be

in the Bible. It happened gradually, over time. The first five books of the Old Testament were passed down for many generations before the books of the prophets were added and later the other books were added too. By the time Jesus was born, the books in the Old Testament were complete and had been gathered together. We don't know exactly how this happened, but one thing that can give us confidence that they got the right books, is that Jesus knew the Old Testament and took it seriously. He quoted from the Old Testament many times.

▶ Jesus and the Old Testament

You will need: Bible, equipment to play video (optional), printout of additional document: Isaiah 61 scroll

This section provides two examples of Jesus quoting from the Old Testament and showing that he believed what it said. Depending on time, you may like to use either one or both of these.

The first example talks about Jesus being tempted by the devil.

Ask the children to listen for what Jesus says in response to the devil's temptations.

Read Luke 4:1-13 or show this short video of the passage from the Lumo Project: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cWvMMFfw7I8>

Each time the devil tempts him, he starts by saying, "It is written..." and in each case the words that follow are a quote from the Old Testament, from the book of Deuteronomy. Jesus knew and trusted what the Old Testament said and he used it to help him fight temptation.

Following on from this, we read

about Jesus using the Old Testament again.

Read Luke 4:16-21, but verses 18-19, when Jesus quotes Isaiah 61, read this section from the scroll. You could have another leader do this or one of the children who you know is a confident reader.

This time Jesus quotes from Isaiah, one of the prophets whose words are in the Old Testament of the Bible, and he tells the people that he is fulfilling these words, that Isaiah was writing about him.

▶ What about the New Testament?

The books we have in the New Testament were written shortly after Jesus died, rose, and ascended to heaven.

As we said, the four gospels, which tell us about Jesus' life, were written soon after the time when the events in them happened. This means that many of the people who knew Jesus and saw the things he did were still alive at the time. If the gospel writers had written things that weren't true, there would be plenty of people who could have corrected them, but instead these accounts of Jesus' life were trusted by the church from a very early stage and they were passed down to future generations.

(Note to leaders: Session 18 "What is the proof of Jesus' resurrection?" looks in more depth at reasons for trusting the accounts given in the gospels)

Many of the other books in the New Testament were also written by people who had known Jesus. For example, there are letters by James, Peter and John. Acts is the history of the early church and is written by the same Luke who wrote the gospel. There are also many other letters by

Paul, who didn't personally know Jesus like some of the other writers, but who lived around the same time and was recognised by the church as someone who had been called by God to spread the word about Jesus.

There was no one point when people sat down to decide which writings should be included in the Bible and which should not, but over time these books and letters were passed down because they were trusted by the church.

There were some other gospels that were written after the four that we have in the Bible and these also claimed to tell of Jesus' life, but they were never trusted by the church in the same way. They were written much later and they didn't seem to fit with what the other gospels said about Jesus.

(If you used the Jigsaw Game at the start, you could refer back to this; it seemed obvious that some of the pieces didn't quite fit.)



REFLECT & RESPOND

▶ Reflection Activity

You will need: printouts from the additional document: Reflection Cards (one card per child), pens or pencils, equipment to play music

In the last two sessions, the children have thought a lot about the Bible. Give each of them a card (from the additional document: Reflection Cards) and encourage them to take a few minutes to think about what they have heard and how they respond to it by completing the questions on the card:

- What words would you use to

describe the Bible?

- What is one new thing you've learned about the Bible?
- What is one question you still have about the Bible?

You could play the song "The Word is Alive" by Casting Crowns as the children complete this activity: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M1dINcCp00>

Depending on your group, and on the time available, you could give them the opportunity to share some of their answers if they would like to.

Encourage them that the best way to discover more about the Bible is to read it for themselves and to ask God to help them understand it. If you encouraged them to use a Bible reading plan in an earlier session you could refer back to this and see how they are getting on with it.

Close the session in prayer.