

Bible Study

Guidelines for a weekly Bible study

There are many ways to organise and lead a Bible study, and the needs of every group of people who engage in Bible study will be different. What is offered here is therefore one example of what can be done using Roots resources. It is aimed at the non-specialist (i.e. it assumes no particular Bible knowledge or training) and/or a home group that may not have a formal leader. It should be adapted to suit local needs.

Preparing for Bible study

It is important to consider what those present want to get out of the time together. Adults learn best when they are 'in charge' of their own learning. So, don't assume you already know what is wanted; ask the members of the group. Use the insights gained to plan the session and choose from the many options available. Also, keep this principle in mind during a session. That is, allow people to ask the questions that are relevant to them, then use the resources to help answer those questions, rather than always using pre-prepared questions. At the end of the session, ask people what they liked and if there is anything that they would prefer to do differently next time.

Using Roots resources for Bible study

The next two pages show you where to find the various resources that are useful for Bible study. They include suggestions about how to use them, what questions you may need to consider, and what alternatives there are within the Roots *Worship Together* resources.

Producing a handout

Bible study as described here does not need any handouts, but you may decide that you need one e.g. the printable **Thrive** resource. In addition, Bible notes, prayer(s) and other relevant resources that may be required can be copied from the relevant section on the Roots website.

Exploring and responding

To understand the text, it is helpful to consider several contexts or layers. For example, in the four Gospels there are at least three contexts: the original events and the eyewitness accounts of them; the writing down of these accounts; and the collection and editing of them to form the Gospels as we have them now. Then there are layers of interpretation: e.g. how the Church has traditionally understood them; how we do so today; and how they relate to our own, very different, culture and context.

To untangle this complexity, we need to explore the Scriptures and respond to them – which we can do in many ways. But whichever method(s) are chosen, it will be most effective when what people are discussing resonates with their everyday lives as followers and disciples of Christ. Therefore, encourage group members to consider questions such as:

- What does this text mean to me?
- What have I learnt?
- How can I apply it (live out my faith)?
- What, specifically, can I do this week?

A structure for a Bible study

It is helpful to have a good structure – to know how you will begin, where (in broad terms) the journey will take you, and how it will end. Here is a suggested structure or shape for a Bible study lasting about an hour (excluding breaks, refreshments, etc.)

- | | |
|---------------------------------|-----------|
| • Welcome and opening prayer | [5 mins] |
| • Read the Bible text | [10 mins] |
| • Explore and respond to it | [30 mins] |
| • Pray together | [10 mins] |
| • End the session; final prayer | [5 mins] |

It is no accident that this outline mirrors the order in which items are presented in the Roots resources, which in turn reflects the fundamental shape of all worship. Bible study is worship too!

Bible reading(s) – this week's focus reading.

Overview – an introduction to the focus reading and the thinking behind the theme explored in this week's resources. The theme is summarised in a single helpful statement.

Bible notes – informed and up-to-date Bible notes written with the week's theme in mind, as well as contemporary resonance and relevance, and application in living out the Christian faith. They can be printed out from the website or photocopied from the magazine for participants to take home.

In Touch – is published every Thursday morning. It is a reflection on the reading in the light of news and current events, together with questions, prayers, and ideas for action. It can help the group to make connections between their study and what is going on in the world around them.

Sermon ideas – each week Roots provides several ideas for preachers to use in preparing sermons and all-age talks; these can also be used to help you start a discussion about the Gospel reading. Choose an idea that speaks to the particular interests or concerns of your group. It may help to express the ideas in your own words, and then to use any suggested questions as a way to get people talking.

Prayers – a range of prayers is offered every week. The sequence matches that used in many denominations. Any of the prayers could be used 'as is' or adapted to suit the local context.

More prayers and prayer activities are offered within the worship outline on the next two pages (see below), and up-to-date and topical **intercessions** are published on the website every Wednesday lunchtime, written just a day or two in advance.

1-7 March 2026

Keep asking questions

John 3:1-17

Nicodemus, a Pharisee, goes to see Jesus, acknowledging him as a man of God. Jesus says that to see the kingdom of God, you must be 'born from above'. Nicodemus doesn't understand, although Jesus says that, being a teacher, he should. Nicodemus persists in asking questions to try to understand what Jesus means.

This week we are thinking about questions and the important part they play in our faith.

Romans 4:13-17

Abram's name change to Abraham in Genesis 17:5 introduces a new condition to God's covenant with him. His male descendants are to be circumcised as a sign of God's promise (Genesis 17:10-14). Paul questions this later development by appealing to an earlier part of the story, in which God promises to bless Abraham as 'the father of many nations' (v.17) solely on the basis of his faith (v.3; cf. Genesis 15:6). For Paul, Abraham's faith makes him a figure of unity and cohesion in a diverse, multi-cultural church. The alternative would be to make racial privilege, signified by the circumcision of Jewish males, an instrument of God's blessing, but this is not what believers in Jesus Christ experience. God gives the Holy Spirit to Jews and Gentiles alike, solely based on faith in Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:1-14).

Bible notes

RCL Lent 2 Year A

John 3:1-17

Jesus often talks to Jewish leaders in the Gospels. But this conversation with Nicodemus is unusual. They talk at night. They speak for others as well as themselves (vv.2,3). Jesus uses intriguing symbols. Their statements raise one question after another.

This conversation was prompted by Jesus' signs, which suggest to Nicodemus and his people that God is working through him. Nicodemus wants to know about God's presence in Jesus. But Jesus doesn't give straight answers. Instead, he mixes metaphors about God's reign with different kinds of birth and the mystery of wind.

Jesus states that, as a rabbi, Nicodemus should understand these earthly images. After all, their roots lie in the Scriptures. If he can't grasp these, how will he understand the heavenly things that Jesus wants to discuss with him, things like the Son of Man's heavenly ascent and descent, and Moses lifting up the serpent in the wilderness (Numbers 21:9)?

Now we realise that Nicodemus' conversation with Jesus is the same word as 'wind' in Hebrew) descending and remaining on Jesus (3:32), and they're about to learn more about the Spirit/wind as water (4:10; 7:35-37). They recognise the talk of heavenly descent and ascent as the language of grace that brings the Son of God into the world as the Word made flesh (1:14), only to raise him to the heavenly glory of the Father's heart through his passion (1:18, 13:1, 17:5).

Nicodemus is the role model for those who want to know more about the gracious presence of God in Jesus, and the salvation that makes the world more like God intends it to be. However hard he finds it to understand Jesus, he continues to ask his questions. And whether or not he finds the answers he is after, he stands up for Jesus later in the Gospel (7:50) and is one of the men who gives him an honourable burial after such a humiliating death (19:38-42). Nicodemus' persistent questioning is a sign of the active faith that, at the end of this Gospel, is endorsed by Jesus' response to the ever-questioning Thomas.

Genesis 12:1-4a

Abram's father, Terah, had migrated with his family from their homeland in Ur of the Chaldeans. They intended to travel to Canaan but instead settled and prospered in Haran (Genesis 11:27-32). After Terah died, God called Abram to resume the journey to Canaan and promised him land and posterity. 'So Abram went, as the Lord had told him' (v.4). Abram did not question God's call or promise, despite having no children with his wife Sarai; questioning comes later in the story (Genesis 15:2; 17:17; 18:12). Abram demonstrated active faith in God's promise, which became the hallmark of his story.

Psalms 121

The psalmist wonders where he will find protection and sustenance in an uncertain world and begins with a question about this. The ever-watchful God provides all that he needs when he is drawn by evil, or under threat from the heat of the sun.

Linking the readings

This week's readings encourage us to ask questions of God and the way we live our lives, especially when we don't understand what God is asking of us. These are not the questions of the non-believer or the sceptic, but the curiosity of believers. The questions of Abram and Paul arise when they're already on the journey of faith. Nicodemus and his people have faith, but it's unclear how much they include Jesus in their vision of God's purposes. The readings suggest that faith always seeks greater understanding and that asking questions is integral to its development.

Hymns & songs

For more suggestions and links, see [here](#).

Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart
Blessed Assurance
Can I trust that God has made me
God so loved, by Hillsong Worship
Guide me, O thou Great Redeemer

1-7 March 2026 | Lent 2

Online at rootsforchurches.com

Thought for the week – read out in place of a sermon
In Touch – linking readings to the week's news
Topical intercessions on current issues
Hymns and songs – additional resources, links and categories
Welsh prayers and hymn suggestions

Sermon ideas

- The Japanese Christian Kosuke Koyama believed that God teaches people slowly and coined the phrase, 'the three-mile-an-hour God' (walking speed is three miles an hour). God taught people by walking with them through the wilderness for 40 years. God isn't in a hurry to teach us what we need to know about him. We can also see this in the way Jesus engaged with Nicodemus, by encouraging him to ask questions, rather than providing simple, quick answers. God walks slowly, says Kosuke, because God is love: the slow, sacrificial love we see in his Son, Jesus. The speed of love is three miles an hour. If God were not love, he would go much faster.
- One of the most important questions we ask when we want to learn is 'Why?'. It lies behind other learning questions, like 'What?', 'When?', 'How?' and 'Who?'. Without asking 'Why?', we don't get much beyond information, because 'Why?' fires our curiosity about the way the world is. Why It Works is a YouTube channel dedicated to stimulating curiosity. Its video titles include 'Why do we have gravity?', 'Why do we dream?', 'Why are some people left-handed?'. Jesus would have been at home with this channel. He tried hard to stimulate Nicodemus' curiosity about God's presence in his signs and teaching. Jesus provoked more questions rather than trying to shut them down, ultimately provoking more learning.
- 'Why?' is often the most frustrating word for parents with young children. Consider the last time you were genuinely curious about why or how something came to be. Often, children have this innately, but it is important for us all because the way to find out more is to ask questions, and lots of them! In our reading from John's Gospel, Nicodemus keeps asking questions. Nicodemus' curiosity about God's presence in his signs and teaching. Jesus provoked more questions rather than trying to shut them down, ultimately provoking more learning.
- In the passage from Genesis, we are told that Abram was 75 years old when God sent him towards the Promised Land, an age at which, today, many people would see their prime working years as behind them. But the journey was just getting started for Abram. Or was it? God had been at work in Abram's life before this moment, and Abram's faith had been forming and evolving. Faith is a journey, often a slow, winding journey. No matter your age or stage of faith, there is always more to learn and more that God might be calling you to do.

Prayers

A prayer of approach

We gather before you, God,
like curious children around a parent's chair;
eager to listen and to learn,
but also with questions in our hearts and on our minds.
We gather in faith that you, all-knowing God,
will hear us with the patience of a good parent,
for you welcome our curiosity
and are always ready to hear earnest questioning.
Amen.

A prayer of adoration

God of all knowledge,
we worship and adore you!
Son who makes the Father known to us,
we worship and adore you!
Holy Spirit who brings wisdom to our hearts and minds,
we worship and adore you! Amen.

A prayer of confession

Heavenly Father,
you created us to be curious creatures,
yet we forget this when it comes to our faith.
We hear the stories of your deeds
with complacency and without comment,
so often forgetting to try and see in depth, to question.
Forgive us for this lack of respect.
We renew our commitment to a relationship with you
that is not afraid to ask questions,
for you delight in the curiosity of your children.
Amen.

Assurance of forgiveness

You forgive us, Lord,
when we become lukewarm and complacent towards you.
You forgive us
when we allow the unimportant things of life
to distract us from the big questions we should be asking.
Praise be to you, God,
for waiting, father-like, to hear and forgive us.
Amen.

A prayer of praise

Lord Jesus,
we thank you for your welcome to Nicodemus
when he sought you by night.
We are grateful that we can come to you at any hour;
you are only a prayer away.
We give thanks that we can ask about what is on our minds.
We praise you for being available to us
at all times and in all places;
that you help us to come to knowledge and understanding.
Amen.

Share the Word – each week there is a suggestion for presenting the focus reading. Sometimes this may need adapting for use in a small group. For example, a drama script could simply be read through. Alternatively, particularly if there are several voices in the reading, you could share the parts between different readers. Or you could read the passage more than once, but from different versions.

Opening prayer – every week here in the **Gather** section is a *Call to worship* and *A gathering prayer*. Other prayers from the **Prayers** section may be appropriate too – e.g. *A prayer of approach* – or could be adapted to suit your context.

First impressions – some people will be helped by a visual stimulus. A carefully chosen image is provided each week, with three questions designed to help you explore the week's themes.

Explore & respond – each week in the outline for worship section, several ideas, in a range of styles – including discussions, film clips, craft activities, prayers and prayer activities – are offered to help people make a personal response to the reading and the themes that are being explored. Many of these ideas are designed for, or can be adapted for use in, small groups.

These letters indicate spiritual styles or preferences. Spiritual styles help you plan a session so that everyone's needs, and the different ways in which people connect with God, are taken into account. Some people like 'doing' more than 'talking'! You can read more about spiritual styles on the Roots website.

Go with God 24/7 – a practical suggestion, related to the week's reading and themes, for living out your faith during the coming week. You could end your study time by spending a few moments discussing the suggestion, before saying together a final prayer. A **Thrive** sheet is also available online.

Keep asking questions

John 3:1-17

All-age worship ideas

Planning Communion? See our **Bread & Wine** resources on pages 8-9.

Gather

Introduction to worship
Use the activity and prayers to gather the group and introduce the theme.

I've always wanted to ask...

- Invite people to get into pairs or groups and explain that you are going to have a time of sharing some questions. Explain that nobody needs to know or find the answer, and the questions may lead to further questions, and that's ok.
- First, encourage the small groups to ask questions of one another. These may be easier to ask and answer, but try to make them things you are really interested in, e.g. where would you like to travel to?
- Next, ask the groups to consider questions about your church building or local area, such as what groups run at the library.
- Finally, see if the groups have bigger questions, about the world or faith, that they are happy to share, e.g. how do we know God will always forgive us? Remind the group again that the questions can remain unanswered.

Call to worship
Come, those who feel certain, and those who feel unsure.
Come, those with few questions, and those with many questions.
Come, those who have just started to ask questions and those who have been asking questions for a long time.
Come, come and worship
the one who has the answers to all our questions.

A gathering prayer
Father God,
we bring before you all our questions,
all our doubts,
and all our uncertainties
and offer them to you, along with our praise,
trusting that you hear us and love us.
Amen.

Share the Word

John 3:1-17

- Before the passage is read, ask those present to keep track of how many questions are asked in this passage. You could also split the group in half so that some people can count Nicodemus' questions and others, Jesus' questions.
- To aid this, it may also help to have three readers of the passage: the narrator, Jesus and Nicodemus.
- After the reading, ask people how many questions were asked (and if they can remember them). Are there any themes emerging? Were any clear answers given?

Genesis 12:1-4a

- Ask for two volunteers: one person to be Abram and one person to be Lot. The person who is Abram could have a bag and be packing things into it, or this could be mimed.
- Use the script below to share the simple story of what happens in this short passage from Genesis:

Abram: We must leave Haran; God will show us a new land.
Lot: Wow! Did God say where the new land is?
Abram: No, but God will make me a great nation, and bless me, and make my name great, so that other people will be blessed.
Lot: Wow! Did God say which other people will be blessed?
Abram: Yes, all the families of the earth!
Lot: Wow! Let's get going. We aren't getting any younger...



First impressions

Questions on the theme

- Do you find it easy to ask questions? Why?
- The questions we ask can reveal a lot about us. What do you think are the motives behind Nicodemus' questions?
- What questions could you bring to Jesus right now?

12 **Roots** Worship Together Issue 142

Explore & respond

Online at rootsforchurches.com
First impressions image with questions
Children's activity sheet and colouring sheet (also in Welsh)
Resources for under 5s
Thrive – a resource for discipleship at home
Small group study on the week's readings

Explore & respond

My big questions
Imagine yourself in the passage

- Invite everyone to imagine that they were Nicodemus (or Abram, if you are focusing on the Genesis passage), and invite them to think about what questions they would have wanted to ask God/Jesus.
- Then, ask them to share their questions in pairs or small groups, before inviting a few groups to feed back to the whole group.
- Discuss together whether there are any emerging themes from the questions people have. Finally, discuss how often there is space in worship for you to explore these types of questions: what might make this easier/more possible?

'The wind blows where it chooses'
Reflect on the source of our faith

You will need: a fan (or, if possible, a tree with low branches, or a windmill on a windy day) and strips of ribbon (if outside, this should be biodegradable).

- Explain that, in the passage, those who are born of the Spirit are compared with the wind. The word, in Hebrew, is the same, and often wind is used as an image for the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is God's ever-moving presence.
- Invite people to hold their strip of ribbon and, as they do so, reflect on ways that they have seen God at work in their life, especially in unexpected ways.
- Ask everyone, one by one, to tie their ribbons to the fan or tree. Then, read John 3:8: 'The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.' If inside, turn on the fan, or if outside, watch the ribbons blow in the breeze.

A simple worship activity
Think about your journey of faith

- Invite people to go on a walk quietly on their own (this could be around the building you are in or outside) and, as they walk, to reflect on their journey of faith. They might like to stop, sit down, and perhaps even take photos of anything they see that reminds them of points on their journey of faith.
- At several points as people are walking around, pose some questions for them to consider: Who has inspired you on your journey of faith? Where are the places that help you feel close to God? What are the times when you find it easiest to pray? How do you feel when you have big questions about God? What do you want to ask God right now?
- Invite people, in twos or threes, to share any reflections or thoughts they have after their walk.

Lent prayer stations

Star questions
What questions do you have?

You will need: gold or silver paper star cut-outs; pens or pencils; a basket; a large sheet of dark-coloured paper; glue.

- Explore together how, sometimes, we have questions about faith that we feel we can't ask or are too embarrassed to ask – maybe this was why Nicodemus came to Jesus at night. Explain that we are going to ask a question and display them on the dark-coloured paper, so they shine out in the night sky, rather than getting hidden away.
- Invite people to write their questions on a star and place them in a basket.
- When everyone has completed this activity, read out each question and, as you do so, stick the stars to the sheet (or ask someone to do this).

A prayer for all ages together
Ask everyone to hold their hands open to God, and slightly raised, as though in a questioning pose.

Dear God,
we offer up to you all our questions,
and ask that we would receive from you
the answers that we need for the next step of our journey,
according to your will.
In Jesus' name we pray.
Amen.

Go with God

Consider together what you have explored and how you will live your faith this week.

- Play the song 'Treasure the Questions' by Martin Joseph. Explore how various big questions have been shared throughout today's activities. Discuss ways in which space could be made in church worship and activities for more sharing of questions about faith: How can you make space to treasure the questions we are all bringing about God?

A sending out prayer
God of our journey and God of our questions,
thank you for being with us each step of our journey,
and that you hear each question we ask –
both those we ask aloud and those we ask silently in our hearts.
Be with us as we journey on and keep asking questions.
Amen.

Go with God
Keep adopting an attitude of curiosity this week and remind yourself to bring questions you have about faith to God in prayer.

All Roots materials are online at rootsforchurches.com 13