

Synod Journey Story Kit Resource:

Encountering Biblical Texts as a Lutheran

Session One: Bible Overview

The first two sessions in this resource are unique. They are meant to provide youth and adults with a background in the Bible and a framework for encountering Biblical texts. These two sessions are longer in length with an instructional focus. The following six lessons (five stories + sending scripture) will involve rituals and scripture passages specific to the Journey and Gathering.

Supplies Needed:

Copies of "Bible Quiz" for each person

"Types of Writing" strip for each person

Pens

Bibles

Paper

Blindfolds

Watermelon

Deck of cards

Copies of Psalm 23 Translations included in this session

Session 1: Bible Overview

OPENING ACTIVITY: Begin by giving each of the youth the quarter sheet Bible quiz included in this packet. Have each of the youth independently take the "Bible Quiz". Tell them these are the statements you are going to consider throughout this session. This will give them a baseline for considering what they believe about the Bible.

Bible Quiz: True or False?

The Bible is a book.

The Bible is all true.

God wrote the Bible.

There is only one version of the Bible.

We believe in the Bible.

Have them keep this quiz with them for the entirety of this session, to refer back to their answers. This session may be their first encounter with the Bible. For others, this may be review. Ask that they strive to learn something new about approaching the Bible.

CONSIDER STATEMENT 1: The Bible is a book. True or false?

Ask for responses. What and why did they answer the way they answered?

ACTIVITY:

Give each youth a Bible. Have a Bible race. Encourage them to be first to find the section of the Bible which you name. Celebrate the person who finds it first but then wait until everyone has found that section before moving on. You may choose to give them the statements in parenthesis to assist their search.

Ask them to turn to Genesis (the first book).

Find Revelation (the last book).

Split their Bible in half and find Psalms (the middle book).

Leaving their Bible open to Psalms, have them take the back half of the pages and split that half in half turning to Matthew (the first book of the New Testament).

LEADER: You just found four books in the Bible. The Bible is actually made up of 66 books, divided into two sections, The Old and the New Testament. The Old Testament includes the books of God and God's people prior to the birth of Christ. The New Testament includes the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus and the work of the apostles.

RETURN TO THE QUIZ:

Re- ask: **The Bible is a book. True or false?**

FALSE: The Bible is actually 66 books. The Bible is more like a library than a book, including all types of writings: works of history, poetry, fiction and non-fiction, letters, manuals, etc.

CONSIDER STATEMENT 2: The Bible is all true. True or false?

Ask for responses. What and why did they answer the way they answered?

ACTIVITY:

Cut the "Types of Writing" sheet into strips, each with a phrase. Give each person a strip with an assigned "type of writing". Instruct them to write 2-3 lines in the assigned type of writing about the last fifteen minutes you've been together:

Write a few lines of a poetry about the last 15 minutes:

Write a few lines for a worship song using the last 15 minutes as inspiration:

Write sentences containing historical facts about the last 15 minutes:

Write a saying that teaches something that applies to the last 15 minutes:

Write the opening lines to a story telling about the last 15 minutes:

Write a few sentences that predict what will happen next after these 15 minutes:

Write a few lines from the beginning of a letter to someone about the last 15 minutes:

Write a few sentences for a direction book about how to repeat the last 15 minutes:

Write a few sentences that tells about a law that you are making in response to the last 15 minutes:

Have everyone share their writing type and the sentences they wrote.

Leader: **While you were all given the same thing to write about, the form you were assigned impacted what you shared about the 15 minutes and how we understood it. We listen to a fact different than a poem, and a law different than a prediction. Likewise we must understand that there are many forms of writing in the Bible and that should impact how we read the different Bible passages.**

ACTIVITY:

Play a game of Telephone. Have your group stand in a line. Pass down the below message written in italics by whispering it into the ear of the person on one end. They must then whisper it into the next person's ear and so on down the line. Each person may ask for one repeat.

Sally likes rubber ducks and sinking ships in wet rain puddles. She sails solid ships through silly seas beneath the tress.

What of the message remained after making it around the group?

Leader: **Consider that many of the writings in the Bible were passed on through oral tradition before being written down. As the message is passed down the line the story's details and wording often get slightly changed by what the person hears and their understanding of what they heard as important.**

If you asked someone to tell you all about their last family vacation, there will most certainly be things that they leave would out because they don't remember them. There will be some things that they don't tell because they won't think they are important to tell. If you ask another family member about the same vacation you may hear some of the same things, but some things will be different. Family members will have had slightly different experiences because of who they are. Their accounts of the same experience will be told differently. However, the overall truth remains, they went on a family vacation. Both are telling the "truth" as they experienced it.

The Bible is full of the writings of people who were telling the truth of their experience of God. When these stories were shared orally, there was an oral accountability within the community. As things were shared, others would be able to interject their understanding and discuss differences in details. The details did not have to be proven true for the overall experience of God to have worth. The accounts held up the reality of God.

RETURN TO THE QUIZ: **The Bible is all true. True or false?**

Depends on how you define "true". If we believe "true" means all historical fact, Lutherans would say this is false. We believe the Bible contains many types of writings that reveal the true God.

CONSIDER STATEMENT 3: God wrote the Bible. True or False.

Ask for responses. What and why did they answer the way they answered?

Leader: **Where did the Bible come from? Many people never think about it. The Bible did not just fall from the sky one day all assembled and printed in multiple languages for all people to read. For many years Biblical stories were passed on by "oral tradition". It was many, many years before things were written down.**

ACTIVITY: Play “You Write It”

Partner up your group. Blindfold person one in each pair and give them each a pen and paper. Have person 2 turn to Psalm 118: 24 “This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.” Person 2 must then take the writing arm of the person 1 and make them “write” down the whole Bible verse. Person 2 may not touch any part of the pen. Person 2 may not read any part of the verse aloud to Person 1. When everyone has finished, remove the blindfolds and show all the written messages. Have the group vote on which message is the most clear.

Leader: **How did the Bible words come to be written down in the first place? As Lutherans, we don’t believe that God took over someone’s body and forced them to write word for word. On the other hand, we don’t believe the Bible is just like any other book, simply a human being writing down their thoughts.**

We would say that the Bible has been “Written by people, inspired by God.” Inspired means “breathed into”. We believe the Bible was written by ordinary people, breathed into, inspired by God. The Bible is the word of God, written by a human, being fully human and inspired by God at the same time.

(See “Re:formed” Sparkhouse Curriculum for more related material - <https://www.wearesparkhouse.org/teens/reform/>)

ACTIVITY: Play this Minute to Win It Game “Cards in a Watermelon”

Cut a watermelon in half the long way. Cut off the end of both halves to make a flat bottom. Stand the half watermelons up, one on each end of a table, facing the pink sides towards your group. Divide your group into two teams. Have your teams line up behind a line, 6-8 feet away from the watermelons’ pink sides. Assign each team a half watermelon. Give each team a stack of playing cards. They have one minute or until they run out of cards to see how many cards they can throw and have stick into their half of a watermelon. At the end of the minute, declare the team with the most cards stuck in their half watermelon the winning team.

Leader: **There were many more books/letters written down about God and God’s people than were included in the Bible. How did they choose which books would be part of the Bible? It wasn’t as random as throwing cards at a watermelon and using what stuck.**

The process of choosing the books that would be included in the Bible was called “Canonization”. Leaders within the Christian community got together and considered all that had been written and passed down throughout the ages. They considered things such as: Were the writings being used by the Christian church? Who were the writings written by? Was the writing consistent with what other writers had written? 66 books were then included in the “Canon”, the Bible.

RETURN TO THE QUIZ: **God wrote the Bible. True or False.**

FALSE – The Bible was assembled through a complex process over many, many years. We as Lutherans believe the Bible was “written by humans, inspired by God”.

CONSIDER STATEMENT 4: There is only one version of the Bible. True or false?

Ask for responses. What and why did they answer the way they answered?

ACTIVITY: Have three different people volunteer to simultaneously read aloud to the whole group these three translations of Psalm 23:

Reader 1:

Psalm 23 from the King James Version:

23 The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

² He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

³ He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

⁴ Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

⁵ Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

Reader 2:

Psalm 23 from The Message:

¹⁻³ GOD, my shepherd!

I don't need a thing.

You have bedded me down in lush meadows,

you find me quiet pools to drink from.

True to your word,

you let me catch my breath

and send me in the right direction.

⁴ Even when the way goes through

Death Valley,

I'm not afraid

when you walk at my side.

Your trusty shepherd's crook

makes me feel secure.

⁵ You serve me a six-course dinner

right in front of my enemies.

You revive my drooping head;

my cup brims with blessing.

⁶ Your beauty and love chase after me

every day of my life.

I'm back home in the house of GOD

for the rest of my life.

Reader 3:

Psalm 23 from the New Revised Standard Version:

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.

² He makes me lie down in green pastures;

he leads me beside still waters;^[a]

³ he restores my soul.^[b]

He leads me in right paths^[c]

for his name's sake.

⁴ Even though I walk through the darkest valley,^[d]

I fear no evil;

for you are with me;

your rod and your staff—

they comfort me.

⁵ You prepare a table before me

in the presence of my enemies;

you anoint my head with oil;

my cup overflows.

⁶ Surely^[e] goodness and mercy^[f] shall follow me

all the days of my life,

and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD

my whole life long.

Leader: **These were all reading from the same Psalm. Were they the same?**

The original writings of the books of the Bible were not written in English. They were originally written in Greek and Hebrew. For many, many years only the pastors and top leaders were able and allowed to read the Bible.

This bothered people like Martin Luther (the founder of the Lutheran Church). He thought that all people should be able to read the word of God. Martin Luther translated the Bible into the language the people of his community could read. Other leaders that could translate from Greek and Hebrew began to do the same in other languages. The complete Bible has now been translated into over 500 different languages and sections of the Bible are translated into around 3,000 languages.

In English alone there are many different versions of the Bible. Each version translates the Greek and Hebrew words slightly differently. Sometimes people have taken an English translation and “transcribed” it into more modern language. As you read the translations you may have noticed the words like “leadeth” and “restoreth”. Languages change overtime. Many times the Bible is translated to use more current language that people will understand.

Even within the same translation, the Bible can be “packaged” differently. Some contain works of art, devotional guides, vocabulary definitions, etc.

However, regardless of which Bible you are reading, Psalm 23 speaks of a loving God that cares for God’s people.

RETURN TO THE QUIZ: There is only one version of the Bible. True or false?

FALSE – there are thousands of translations of the Bible.

CONSIDER STATEMENT 5: We believe in the Bible. True or false?

Ask for responses. What and why did they answer the way they answered?

ACTIVITY:

Have the youth pair up. Have the pairs line up at one end of the room. When you say “go”, one person will pick up and carry the other player from one side of the room to the other in a race against the other pairs.

NOTE: At the end, you will make a big deal about announcing the winner. Without naming anyone rave about what an amazing job this person did to be the first person across the room. Then surprise everyone by give the award to the person who was carried, not the carrier.

Leader: **The Bible carries the Good News of Christ. We don’t celebrate the carrier, we celebrate what it carries. Martin Luther said “The Bible is the manger that holds the Christ”. When we celebrate Christmas we don’t celebrate the manger, we celebrate the baby. When the shepherds and wise men came they didn’t bow down and worship the manger but rather the Christ. Likewise, we don’t worship and celebrate the Bible, we celebrate the God it holds up for us.**

RETURN TO THE QUIZ: **We believe in the Bible.**

FALSE – We believe in God.

WRAP UP:

Have everyone look back at their quiz.

Ask:

Did you end up changing any of your original answers? Why?

What do you want to remember from today's session as you read the Bible in the future?

This session was developed by Shivon Miller, NE MN Synod Journey Worship Team Leader, over the course of many years in ministry and from inspiration of many resources and colleagues. It is provided for the use of congregations in the NE MN Synod, ELCA, in preparation for the 2018 NE MN Synod Journey to the ELCA Youth Gathering. For congregational use only.

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TYPES OF WRITING:

Write a few lines of poetry about the 15 minutes:

Write a few lines for a worship song using the last 15 minutes as inspiration:

Write sentences containing historical facts about the last 15 minutes:

Write a saying that teaches something that applies to the last 15 minutes:

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