

Case Study – Day Workshop in Tanzania

Background: This day workshop was held in Morogoro, Tanzania in October 2013 following an intensive 3-day seminar with three Tanzanian church leaders exploring how the central theme of the “Bible in the Life of the Church” [BILC] project might be looked at in Tanzania. The outline of this workshop was then used by the three leaders in other parts of Tanzania. What follows is an outline of the workshop, **a commentary from Stephen Lyon**, the Coordinator of BILC who observed the event and an assessment of the workshop. It is offered as a Case Study that might be adapted for use elsewhere.

The Aim of the Workshop:

To encourage and equip church leaders to motivate congregations to a deeper engagement with the Bible.

Or in its Tanzanian context: “Kuwatia moyo na kuwawezesha viongozi wa kanisa ili wawatie moyo waumini washiriki kwa kina katika kusoma, kutafakari, na kuelewa Biblia.”

The outline of the programme:

Coffee/tea on arrival

10.00 Welcome and Introductions

Who facilitators are
Aims of the project

10.15 Bible engagement – Job 1:6-12 [in small groups]

Passage chosen for its application to the local context of Tanzania.

Questions:

1. What picture of Satan does the passage give?
2. What is the relationship between Job's wealth and his piety?
3. What is the source of Job's suffering?
4. How do you apply such a passage?

11.15 Feedback

Written by the group then shared followed by discussion.

12.00 Share experiences of how they encourage people to deeper engage with Scripture apart from preaching.

Go around asking each person to contribute.

13.00 Lunch

14.30 Back to the aim

How far have they understood the aim and are there questions.

14.45 What are the challenges to deeper engagement with Scripture?

Participants asked to share challenges and suggest ways to meet those challenges.

15.45 Conclusion and summing up

Participants: there were 13 in total [4 women and 9 men] all clergy or lay leaders from Anglican Churches in the Morogoro and Ruaha Dioceses in Tanzania.



Welcome and Introductions

The introduction expanded the overall aim of BILC project and what the workshop was seeking to do – to motivate and enthuse those present so they can return to their ministry better equipped. It put the BILC project in its Anglican Communion context explaining why the project was started. The role of facilitators was outline i.e. not there to give answers but 'working together to find the answers'.

Bible engagement

Four different participants read through the passage. Participants were asked to form three groups and each group took one question each with all exploring question 4. Each group reported back to the plenary.

There was a lively discussion following formal input: Question raised by facilitators whether it was easy or difficult to understand passage - difficult to understand. Question raised by facilitators about challenges it presents. Useful to have discussion – it went deeper into the passage to get fuller understanding through others. There was difficulty in relating the passage to today because we do not know the original context or genre [true story, setting etc]. Question raised by one of the participants on the setting of episode and who wrote it down? Realisation that we cannot have answers to all our questions.

The passage certainly raised a number of hermeneutical questions and outlined the challenge faced by pastors as they seek to encourage their congregations to go deeper into Scripture. There was a desire to find answers to the hard questions the passage raised. Also there was a need to voice them. And a struggling to make sense of passage as it is. Lots of answers given with confidence by other participants and politely received.

Share experiences of how they encourage people to deeper engage with Scripture apart from preaching.

One of the facilitators then linked this section with the last by saying that even with the doubts and difficulties we have, how do we go deeper into Scripture? To what extent do we enable Christians to go into a deeper engagement with the Bible?

These comments followed:

- We need an outline of approach to Bible Study [modelled in parts of Diocese of Morogoro] - Look at main meaning of passage; try to understand the original context; then verse by verse interpretation; then relate past to present.
- The Mothers' Union worker in Morogoro was "exercised about 'going deeper'". "Methods ok but how do we encourage people to go deeper – if they do not there is a danger of them going to another church or religion."
- Another asked the question, "I wonder if I am able on my own to go deeper? If I understand with my head is it going into my heart so I really understand it? Help is needed with applying the text to now. How can I help others to go deeper?"
- "The Friday Bible Study [a common feature in many Tanzanian churches] now only attracts a few, some none at all."
- There was a realisation that people don't know the Bible so introducing it at other gatherings e.g. in choir or weekday evening services might be helpful to encourage more Bible engagement. The challenge is getting people interested, offer a taster one week then more, getting people excited, engaged. There is a real passion to find new ways of engaging with the Bible.
- "If people don't turn up at church, what can they do at home? There are books available, Scripture Union – but a need for more explanatory books and ways to



look at the Bible in families as well as in the church.

- Another spoke of moving the Bible Study to the home of one of the elders who couldn't get there. Also of using film – The life of Jesus.

In summary the facilitator suggested that there was a difference between preaching and teaching – through teaching we need to ask questions which cannot do with preaching. What ways can we use?

Afternoon

This began with the question: "What is or leads to deeper engagement?"

The following comments were made:

- The Bible has to touch the hearts and minds of the teacher before it will enable the congregation to go deeper.
- We need to dig deeper to get to the roots to get better fruit.
- Is there the prior question – what does deeper engagement/go deeper mean? 'By your fruits you will know them'.
- Asking question 'why?' when reading so that we might know the intention of the writer.
- "We are talking about 'others' going deeper – what about us [the church leaders] reading and understanding the Word?" Yet, as pastor, no time to study the Bible. Real need for the pastors to be fed before feeding his flock.
- A contribution by one of the lay women – "we need to put into practice what we read for it to go deeper but we need the tools that the pastors have to understand the Word."
- Reading Bible is work, need Holy Spirit to understand. Foundations are not now laid at Sunday School so as our Christians grow up they have less knowledge.
- Small groups and discussion was probably unusual for many – certainly not the norm.
- Got to make the time to do it!

What are the challenges to deeper engagement with Scripture?

- Enthusing people to attend at Bible Study – getting people to come.
- Economics of time – people have not got time because of 'just living'
- Pastors are busy so do not spend time helping people in this aspect of their lives.
- We are competing with TV and so much more to engage people, church not keeping up with times, same as 20-30 years ago in way it does things.
- Literacy – people cannot read or read well
- 'Can someone explain it to me?' Have we anything to say?
- Church losing out to those 'inspirational speakers' from other denominations or sects. Are we interesting enough to hold on to members?
- We need to understand the times we live in but we also need to love people and help them.
- Look at question – why people leaving church?



Summing up

In summing up the facilitator suggested that we need to understand the Word of God – people are leaving the church, we need to bring them back to the Word. What are you taking home?

1. Aim of workshop – keep hold of the aim as it is one of the aims of our ministry.
2. Get into habit of doing it ourselves – personal deeper engagement. Books, notes, go deeper – meatier. Asking ‘what does it mean in our context today?’ Easy book but difficult book, hard work to understand.
3. How do we encourage people to come to Bible studies, go deeper? How do they can understand it ‘as Anglicans’?

Assessment of the Workshop

These are the summary of the points that were discussed the following morning:

Content of input

The Introduction needed to include something that pointed to the fact that our engagement with Scripture in practice (what we do) was not in keeping with what we say.

Bible engagement session – reading 4 times was appreciated.

Afternoon programme felt rushed. More time might be given on the Challenges and ideas of how we might meet them. Can we offer examples of how these challenges have been addressed?

Process

Bible questions – worked well in groups but felt that there needed to be more emphasis on the challenges the passage presented in teaching and application. More like our own times of Bible engagement.

Facilitators – worked well having three working together – how might you work with others in your workshops. Also, be bold to intervene with questions to keep the group focussed on the purpose of the workshop. This was especially so when we looked at ‘challenges’ – these need linking with possible answers giving practical ideas participants can go away with.

Other comments

Women – it was really helpful to have a mixed – men & woman – group.

Good numbers? How many in your workshops? We suggested that 12-15 might be ideal.

Facilitators

Rev Emmanuel Bwatta, Diocesan Secretary for the Diocese of Western Tanganyika and College Tutor at Kasulu Bible College

Rev Canon Dr Dickson Chilongani, then Provincial Secretary of the Anglican Church of Tanzania and presently Bishop of Central Tanganyika

Rev Timothy Erasto Chimeledya, Library Tutor at St Philip’s Theological College, Kongwa

