

# training materials.

## remembering the bible

### AIM

This training material aims to introduce a method of Bible study called Remembering the Bible, that is used in some of the Vision4life Bible Year material.

### WHICH BIBLE?

In some of the Bible studies available for the Vision4life Year of the Bible we will do something unusual: we will not use a Bible. Not a written down one anyway. We will use the Bible that is inside us: a remembered Bible. Just as there are many different translations of the Bible we could choose to use so there will be very many different remembered versions of the Bible. Whilst it is a huge generalisation to say 'There is a Bible in everyone' I hope that rather than dismiss the idea now you will try some of these Bible studies and see what you do remember and why.

This method of using remembered or oral versions of the Bible, rather than written ones,

- is a way of using the bible that I have been working on for over a decade;
- has been used with many different groups of people (different sized groups, groups of different ages and abilities, groups from different places with different backgrounds and different concerns)
- grew out of the experience that not everyone can use written Bibles

### HOW AND WHERE TO DO IT

You can remember the Bible anywhere. All it needs is a group of people willing to just go for it. If you meet together on Sunday mornings for worship, you might want to include this then, but you could do it on Tuesday tea-time or Wednesday morning, or at the next committee meeting or at a bus stop or in the queue at the post office. It can work really well outdoors but if you do this outside be prepared for the weather.

Remembering the Bible is not necessarily about rote remembering of chunks of text word for word. Some people do remember the Bible like this, and can contribute to this process but it is not necessary for everyone who takes part to know a lot about the Bible. Rather, they need to be willing to work together with other people in a collaborative way to share what the whole group remembers. It is not a method for know alls or for those who like the sound of their own voices in group discussions. Loud people need to consider quiet people and quiet people need to know that silence is not a waste of time. The group facilitator needs a listening ear and a gentle hand to guide people through the process rather than a Sergeant Major voice or a need to stick to the rules of engagement.

### BEGINNING TO REMEMBER THE BIBLE

It's a good idea to start with something that is likely to be well remembered. So how will you know what that is? Well, from my research I would suggest that you choose a well known episode from the life of Jesus life. Of these the best remembered seem to be either the ends of his life, Christmas and Easter stories, or well known stories from his life and ministry like his baptism, calling disciples, feeding 5,000 people, calming a storm or something similar. The whole group could be involved in choosing what to remember although this obviously takes longer than if the group leader suggests something and we go with that. However, you can always check out whether or not the story you suggest is memorable enough by asking the whole group to indicate if they remember it or not: a nod or shake of the head is the only response necessary at this point. Lots of nods: then go for

# training materials.

## remembering the bible

it. Few nods: go more carefully or suggest something else. Of course you might want to suggest something specific depending on the time of year in which case you may need to proceed whether or not it seems very well remembered by your straw poll. That need not be a problem. It may take longer, progress more slowly and require more listening but it will not necessarily be a waste of time. What ever you choose to do there is an element of risk involved.

### GETTING STARTED

Invite the whole group to form into small groups informally, perhaps with the people they know or have already spoken to, and ask them to remember the story together in these small groups. If it is only a minority who remember the story you may need to spread these people round the rest of the group first, before beginning the remembering. In which case, invite small groups to form around these people who are going to be the catalysts on this occasion.

### GETTING LEFT OUT

There may be some people who don't join in for whatever reason. If it is a question of limited physical mobility then please ensure that groups that are more mobile move to include those less mobile. If it is about assumptions concerning who can and who can't do it, then try to challenge those assumptions, gently but firmly. Remembering the Bible is a can do it process. We can do it, because we do it together. People of all ages and abilities can participate if the rest of the group is ready to let it happen. However, there may be some people who choose not to do it. Hopefully anyone opting out will respect the wishes of those who also opt in but Remembering the Bible on your own is fine too, as is doing something else.

### REMEMBERED VERSIONS

While the groups are remembering their version of the story go around and listen in from the edges to what is happening. Try to pick up what is being said as you may want to feed some of these insights into the process later on. Check with the groups about how they are getting on and when everyone thinks they have a remembered version of the story ready then call the groups back together. Depending on time and setting you may want to hear all the different versions or you may want to assemble one version for the whole group taking bits from all the remembered versions in the smaller groups. If someone suggests an aspect of the story you didn't think of, resist the temptation to see the answer as 'wrong', but as an opportunity to see the Bible in a new way.

End with a period of silence and the affirmation *'God's gift to us is beyond words'*.

### WHAT NEXT?

What happens next, like the rest of this process, will depend where you are and who is involved. That's always true of contextual bible studies. It will be different with a group of multi-lingual migrant workers, a committee meeting about the building fund, at a multi-cultural youth group, in the 'all-age' slot of the Sunday morning worship. In this method what we remember and how we interpret the story are closely related. Our own experiences will influence what we remember and why. Try to encourage people to bring these links out in the discussion after the retelling. Once again you may want to use smaller gossiping groups and remind people that listening is the hallmark of the remembering process.

# training materials.

## remembering the bible

This method of using the Bible is high on chaos and energy. It may contrast with your more usual formal setting for Bible study in which the most chaotic part is finding the page, chapter or verse in the first place. It may also contrast with the usual way the group relates to each other: more informality, some new voices emerging. Don't expect instant success, but be prepared to try it again in some other situations. It's a process that throws up as many questions as answers, but with practice it can generate opportunities for people to share insights about the Bible with each other in a way that is engaging and affirming.

### OTHER WAYS OF STUDYING THE BIBLE

Of course it can be used alongside other more traditional or familiar methods of Bible study. A Remembered version could be followed by reading from a written translation, for example. Remembered and written versions could be compared, but if you do this it is important that people don't see it as a test which they have failed if their version is very different from the one you choose from the written Bible. Indeed, if you want to do work on specific aspects of the text, its origins, meanings of words or phrases linked to the original Greek or Hebrew, then a remembered version of the Bible is not the best one to use. The Remembered version is more useful if you want to look at the story from the point of view of marginalised characters or groups and hear voices you have previously overlooked, both in the story and in the group. The Remembered Bible process is as much about building up the group, their confidence and self-esteem as it is about doing anything with the Bible. In that respect is a potential tool for community development in the faith community and, as such, its extended use over time is likely to yield more positive change than its one off use as a novelty.

### CHECK LIST FOR REMEMBERING THE BIBLE

1. Remembering the Bible is not set in stone: you do it your way in your setting;
2. Remembering the Bible is risky and usually chaotic: you are likely to need to do it more than once to feel you are getting the hang of it;
3. Remembering the Bible is for everyone: not just adults, or children, or people with communication and literacy difficulties, but it can and has been used with all of these;
4. Remembering the Bible is different: we do something different (i.e. not use a written down Bible) in order to see the Bible and ourselves in a different way;
5. Remembering the Bible is about change: we do it to explore the Bible in a new way so that new insights can emerge, which can change us and our situation (if you do not want this to happen do not use this method);
6. Remembering the Bible is about working together: it is collaborative rather than competitive;
7. Remembering the Bible is about many voices, not one voice.
8. Remembering the Bible can be fun!

# training materials.

## remembering the bible



### EVALUATION

Please try to answer these questions for yourself and for others who will use this material:

1. What was the most helpful thing?
2. What was the least helpful thing?
3. What would you like to try now?

### THE NEXT STEP

If you want more training materials please revisit the menu. If you want to go onto a main course 'Remembering him' is a Bible study that includes some remembering activities. For Desert try Kennings and Cookies. There are other Bible studies available in the booklet and on the website that use different methods.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This material was contributed by Janet Lees: a speech therapist and URC minister, she is Vision4life Bible Year Co-ordinator. Her book about Remembering the Bible, called 'Word of Mouth: Using the Remembered Bible for Building Community', contains resources for groups who want to do Remembering the Bible and is published by Wild Goose Publications.