

all age main course

who do you think you are? family trees and the bible

AIMS

To explore some biblical families and relate them to our own faith families using photographs, paintings and the Bible, so that we might answer the question 'Who do you think you are?' in our churches today.

INTRODUCTION

Tracing family histories is increasingly popular. Maybe you have tried to do this, or someone you know has, maybe you'd like to do this or you've read a book or magazine or watched a TV programmes about this. The popular BBC series 'Who do you think you are?' had famous people tracing their family tree. There are also some magazines which help you to do this. This Bible study will help you to connect your ancestors to the ancestors we have in faith through the bible. This will give us an opportunity to consider how these forebears (a hopelessly zoological word) influence us and our faith families today.

HOW LONG HAVE WE GOT?

This Bible activity session is a companion to the Main course Bible study on Jesus' Ancestors. This one is designed for use by a group of all ages and abilities to take anything from an hour and a half to half a day or so. However, if this is something your group decides to take further it could become the starting point for a series of activities including a wide ranging oral history project.

YOU WILL NEED

Some photographs, pictures or documents of the family members of participants, some of whom may already have tried to trace their family tree (but this is not necessary to take part in this session).

Material for being creative: paint, card, computer scanner and printer, scrapbooking materials, photo album, pencils, paper..... whatever you think would be helpful. Your final choice of materials will depend on your budget, how many people are taking part, what you hope to make by the end. If you want to use photographs of real people then the computer scanner and printer will mean that you can make copies of the originals of photographs that people bring along. Similarly if you want to use paintings you can photograph or photocopy these and then print a copy. Many hobby shop stock the basic materials for scrap booking and various magazines and websites provide ideas for how to do this. Alternatively you could go for the 'low-tech' approach using paper and card, paints, pens and crayons. Whichever way you do it remember that although there's no need to 'spend, spend, spend' to make this session work the old felt pens without lids and broken crayons from the back of the cupboard speak volumes about how you value such all age sessions and the participants. At least try to have stuff that works and will produce a good result.

You will probably need a small team of facilitators/helpers depending on the ages, abilities and numbers of participants, particularly if you are going to use computers as well as more basic art and scrapbooking.

There is a power point presentation about Ancestral Portraits and bible study by John Campbell which is available to download on the Vision4life website. You might want to look at this before the session.

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PART ONE: TRACING YOUR FAMILY TREE

You could start by asking how many generations back, and to whom, people can trace their ancestry or simply asking, 'What do you know of your own family background?' Invite people to show their photos and tell (short) stories about these people. Some participants may have traced bits of their family tree. This may be interesting but try not to let one or two people dominate the session as this can be intimidating or boring for other participants who may have less to say.

Then, having found heard a few stories, ask again, 'Why does it matter who your ancestors are?'

You could point out that BIOLOGICALLY, people tend to have:

- 2 parents
- 4 grandparents
- 8 great grandparents
- 16 great, great grandparents
- 32 great, great, great, grandparents

Yet, people often tend to trace their ancestry through ONE line of descent... and we're happiest if that one line is descent from someone famous or important. You may want to recall how this worked on the recent TV series if you and others saw that, or perhaps an article from a magazine or local paper that is relevant.

ACKNOWLEDGED ANCESTRY IS OFTEN HIGHLY SELECTIVE.

PART TWO: REMEMBERED ANCESTORS

The bible is full of ancestors. Whilst we might struggle to work out how exactly we are biologically related we are related through the faith story. There are some famous families in the bible. Invite the group to think of some famous families and see who they can remember (if the whole group is very large, you could do this in small groups). Provide some paper for them to record their remembered biblical ancestors. Once people get started with this go around the groups watching and listening. If necessary encourage groups verbally, and suggest they look for the least remembered members. This is often the women: ask them why they think this happens? Encourage people to draw the biblical families like a family tree with gaps for bits they don't remember or don't know. You may need to provide an example of a family tree drawn like this for those unfamiliar with this strategy.

Invite people to put their biblical family trees up for others to look at.

PART THREE: ILLUSTRATING OUR ANCESTORS

What happens next will depend on who is present and what they prefer to do. Try to offer a range of activities as this means participants can work in parallel according to their preference. This means that people who like to get messy with paint and collage and stuff can do so, but those who want to keep their shirt clean or like to use words or computer can do that. This way everyone participates in a way that suits them, the final result is more creative and participants are less likely to feel patronised or left out.

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Participants could either

- Illustrate their own family tree paying particular attention to what they know about their connections with the faith community;
- Illustrate one of the biblical family trees either by creating their own pictures of what they think these people might have been like or by referring to further details in a written version of the biblical text to fill in the gaps in their remembering.

For example if there is a family tree for Jesus' ancestors.....

Look up the family history in the opening verses of Matthew's Gospel (Chapter 1:1-17). If possible, make a long scroll with the names of the ancestors of Jesus written out in accordance with the three-fold structure to which Matthew deliberately draws our attention. The four women he also inserts need to be there, possibly over to the right of the main column of male ancestors and possibly in a distinctive colour. Such a scroll can quite simply be made with lining paper and a thick felt marker pen. The ends of the paper, when complete can then be attached to the two halves of a bisected broom handle, to make the roll more scroll-like or illustrated in other ways.

This may be the place to start a discussion about Jesus ancestors...

Referring to the scroll:

- What names do we know? What names don't we know? Where do these occur?
- This is the very beginning of Matthew's Gospel. What does that say about its importance? What might it be trying to say about Jesus?
- Who are the main characters? How do these people relate to the story of God's involvement with this people?
- But this is meant to say something about Jesus – what do we think it's trying to tell us?

What about the women?

If there's time, you might like to get the group (possibly in four sub-groups) to research the stories of these women for themselves, by reading the relevant passages. Otherwise you will have to rely on coaxing as much information out of the group as you can (using the remembered bibles approach), but being ready to supply the necessary details from your own preparation reading if they cannot remember much about one or more of the women.

The bible references for the four women are:

- TAMAR Genesis 38
- RAHAB Joshua 2 & 6:21-25
- RUTH Ruth
- URIAH'S WIFE 2 Samuel 11 & 12

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PART FOUR: OWNING OUR CHRISTIAN ANCESTORS

This is something else you can do if there's time.....

Churches often have portraits or photographs of former members and ministers. Does your church have any of these? Where are they? Does anyone know who they are?

You may want to discuss the history that these people represent. Does anyone remember any of these people? What did they do? How have they influenced us? Who are we happy to own as our Christian ancestors? Who embarrasses us? Who do we choose to ignore?

Understanding the history of our church can help to see where we have come from. This in turn can help us to discern where we are going. As part of the Vision4life process you may want to start an oral history project.

Oral history is....

the living memories and feelings of ordinary people, many otherwise hidden from history, and creates a more vivid picture of our past [according to the Oral History Society].

It is a way of recording people's memories: everyone has a unique life experience and Oral History values this. You can record Oral History using audio or video tape, a camcorder or webcam. It allows ordinary people who have been hidden from history to be heard and for their past lives and experiences to be recorded for use by families and communities.

Some churches have already carried out oral history projects, sometimes as part of a church anniversary or other community event. If you do this remember that it is likely to be a longer term project and you might want to look for some additional funding for this. However, it can be a good activity for the involvement of the wider community

PART FIVE: TWO SONGS THAT YOUR GROUP MIGHT SING...

You might want to close you session with a time of worship in which you share some of the stories from the bible, your families or faith community. Here are some songs by John Campbell which you could use. They are to well known tunes which can be found in Rejoice and Sing. A 'Songs of Praise' session with a twist could be held in which people talk about the hymns which influenced their ancestors and then the ones that are of influence now.

WHOSE CHILD ARE YOU?

Matthew 1:1-21

tune: Quem pastores laudavere

1. (all) Child of Abraham the wand'rer
leaving wealth enough to squander,
on God's promised hope to ponder -
Abram's child, hope for us all.
2. (all) Child of Tamar stripped of honour,
bruised, abused for other's pleasure;
yet to God a priceless treasure -
Tamar's child, hurt for us all.

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3. (Women) Child of Ruth, Naomi's shadow,
faithful friend to friendless widow,
destitute in harvest meadow -
Ruth's true child, befriend us all.
4. (All) Child of Rahab, trait'rous harlot,
rescued by a cloth stained scarlet,
sharing God's invasion secret -
Rahab's child, come save us all.
5. (Men) Child of David's bride, Bathsheba
victim of a lust most eager;
sign that God forgives for ever -
Sheba's child, forgive us all.
6. (All) Child of Mary, virgin mother,
bearing for us God, our brother,
so we'd learn to love each other -
Mary's child - God with us all.

Words by John Campbell

JOSEPH'S FAMILY

Matthew 1.

tune: Noel nouvelet

1. Joseph son of David, son of Abraham;
regally descended, son of tent and psalm;
waited the day when, filled with joy and pride,
he'd be wed to Mary, she would be his bride.
2. Joseph, though a poor man, with no wealth or fame,
yet possessed a treasure in his fam'ly name.
He must pass on this honour to his son -
lineage from David - then his job was done!
3. Yet, before the wedding, Mary was with child
and there was no father; ev'ry one went wild!
What could he do, to keep his name intact?
Mary must be banished! Surely he must act!
4. Calmly, at God's prompting, Joseph held his ground,
risking, trusting, waiting; Mary still around.
Somehow he knew, though how he could not tell,
God would act through Jesus, all would then be well.
5. Showing such devotion, Joseph stood in line
with ancestral women working God's design -
Rahab, and Tamar, Bathsheba and Ruth -
each, when others faltered, stood for hope and truth.

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6. Now this gift of Joseph – ancestry and name -
graciously surrendered, nevermore the same;
offered to Jesus, till God's work is done,
welcomes all the nations, seeks to make us one.

Words by John Campbell

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

This material comes from the Main Course All Age section of the menu.

You could choose something else from that section, or go on to something from another section.

If you have written some songs yourself, why not send them in?