

Acting out Acts: Post Vision4Life



Session 5: A total commitment

INTRODUCTION

This session makes use of Bibliodrama. You can find out more about this in the introduction to this series which is on the Vision4Life website. You will need to read this before going ahead with this session.

SESSION 5: A TOTAL COMMITMENT

Read

This 5th session is based on Acts chapter 7 so read this individually or as a group. Alternatively you may wish to use the remembered bible technique described towards the end of this session.

Notes on Acts 7

Stephen had started as a deacon. As one of the leaders among Greek-speaking Christians in Jerusalem, he was trusted to organise the church's care for its widows (6.1–7). But his main role in the story of Acts is as a preacher and martyr. His message got under the skin of some powerful people (6.8–13), and he ended up being dragged out of the city for stoning (7.58–60). Chapter Seven is part of his trial. It is his defence – of sorts – although in places it seems more like an attack on the people who had opposed him.

The speech goes on for fifty verses. In it Stephen dips deep into the Old Testament, and retells stories of God's dealings with the people of Israel. As any story-teller must, he is selective. He chooses his material to make a point. There seem to be two main themes.

One is prophecy. Prophets – people who speak for God and challenge others to put God's word into action – are often rejected or ignored. Joseph's brothers did not recognise him (7.9–13). Moses' first attempt to help his people was a failure (7.23–29). Again the people rejected him on the Exodus journey (7.35, 39–41). It is a pattern: prophets get persecuted, and Jesus was part of that line of faithful suffering (7.52).

The second theme is place. God often works in settings we might not expect. Abraham heard God's word far away from the promised land (7.2–3). So did Joseph (7.9–10) and Moses (7.30–31). In the desert, in foreign lands, and in times of suffering and fear, God has been alive and at work. So it could be a bad mistake, to think that we can tell God where to meet us. A tent sufficed for the Exodus people (7.44). The golden calf might have been bright and precious, but it could not show people the true God (7.40–43). And sometimes our human desires for buildings and systems to put God in will be misguided too (7.48–50).

So Stephen's speech is about finding God in unexpected places, trusting God in difficult times, recognising that God is always free to work in new ways, and listening for the awkward and unconventional people who might have a word from God to bring us.

Indeed Stephen himself surely struck people as a difficult and undisciplined sort of character. Yet now we honour him as the first Christian martyr. Luke tells of his death – outside the city (7.58) – in ways that recall the death of Jesus. And the church marks his saint's day on Boxing Day, December 26th – a reminder that celebrating Jesus truly is a costly commitment. If we join our lives to the life and cause of Jesus, if we listen to the undertones of God's scripture story, we too may have pressures and pain to encounter and endure.

Yet Stephen's martyrdom led to wide and successful mission: to Samaria (8.5–25), Ethiopia (8.26–39), and on to the Greek and Roman world. Tell God's story well, and the flame will spread.

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Acting out Acts: Chapter 7

You will need to decide in advance how to do this:

- How many people will take part?
- Which parts will they play/read/retell?

ACTS THROUGH BIBLIODRAMA

Has Stephen departed from his job description? He was appointed as a social worker not as the preacher of a radical ideology!

Break into small groups and prepare an argument for and against the case that he is in breach of his job description.

Act out a tribunal. Someone needs to present the case for and against and someone needs to be Stephen. There may also be witnesses.

Afterwards reflect on how the scene worked out and the issues raised. Remember to help the participants to come out of the roles they have taken.

For discussion

Stephen recalls God's story. What kind of person do you think he was and why?

Which parts of the story do you think particularly significant or do you relate to particularly in your church and why?

Telling this story led to Stephen being stoned. Why do you think this happened?

Why might story telling be a risky business?

Alternative Bible input: Remembering the Bible

One strategy we encouraged churches to use during the Vision4life process was an oral strategy called 'Remembering the Bible' in which people collaborate in a group to reconstruct bible stories of importance to them and their community.

Are there parts of the bible that you remember as significant for understanding the whole of God's Story? What would you say these were? Give participants time to think of some and then write them up on a flip chart. Accept all suggestions for this activity. What one person thinks important to the whole story is as good as any other person's response.

Do people remember the story of Stephen? Record these on your flip chart.

About Vision4life

Of course not everything that happened in Vision4life was straightforward. There were many challenges to meet along the way. One person said:

'Working out how to do something from Vision4life in the congregation that tried tasters in Sunday morning services then decided there should not be discussion in Sunday worship but wanted to have groups at another time. But when the groups were held attendance was very small numbers. I'll have to think of other opportunities because the Bible is important and Vision4life material is worth it.'

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What sort of challenges did you face through Vision4life? How did you meet them?

Prayer

Pray about the direction your church needs to take now. Give thanks for the journey behind you and wait for the Spirit to reveal the way ahead.

Life-changing Spirit,

You call us to follow and we set out not knowing where you will ultimately lead us.

Help us to be ready to change direction and find new ways of serving when you call us.

May we not be so bound to the past as to ignore the present,

nor so hoodwinked by the present as to neglect our origins,

but to so live for Christ that we are ever alive

and mindful of his company and his prompting.

SOMETHING TO DO

What roles are important in your local church? How do you promote them?

Maybe interview some members who have different roles and see if you can come up with some new ways of promoting what the churches does and is through their stories and experiences.

EVALUATION

Please try to answer these questions for yourselves:

1. What was the most helpful thing about this session and why?
2. What was the least helpful thing and why?
3. What would you like to try now?

THE NEXT STEP

The Vision4life process is a three year process for local churches. You will find the resources available on our website where they can be downloaded freely.

Acknowledgements

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