

WHY BOTHER WITH BIBLE STUDY?

Whatever you decide to do in your newly formed CSNM group I would suggest that some element of Bible study is essential – even if you simply open a time of prayer by reading a Psalm or a few verses from elsewhere in Scripture. In John's Gospel, Jesus is recorded saying,

I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it. I know that his command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say. (John 12:49-50)

Later, in chapter 14, Jesus also tells his apostles that when he sends them the Holy Spirit, the Spirit will remind them of what Jesus has said to them and will also lead them into 'all truth' from God the Father. And at the end of Luke's Gospel Jesus appears to two of his followers, and 'beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.' (Luke 24:27)

Thus we have it on Jesus' authority that when we read Scripture – both the Old and the New Testaments - we are reading God's own words to us. This being the case we should not treat Bible study lightly, or as something of low priority or of little consequence.

The thing that sets your CSNM group apart from any other gathering of nurses and midwives is that you are Christians – people who are able to call God 'Father' because of Jesus' death on the cross. If you are not calling on him and listening to him as you meet together, where has your distinctiveness gone?

Similarly the thing that sets your CSNM group apart from any other Christian group is that you are all nurses and midwives – the point of meeting in this capacity is to allow God to encourage us specifically in our professions. How can he do this if we don't listen to what he has said and then ask how should this shape our development as students of nursing or midwifery?

Why Bother with Study?

Just reading an Ian Fleming novel doesn't turn us into James Bond (fortunately!) and neither does just reading the Bible mould us into the likeness of Christ - yet all too often we read God's word without engaging our brains, treating it like a magic spell. Before we can teach God's word to others or apply it to our lives we must first have studied it for ourselves. And because this *is* God's word, we must be careful to approach it prayerfully, humbly, expectantly and obediently - we must ask God to help us understand his word, and engage our brains to work hard at receiving this understanding.

A Few Tips to Get You Started

Some things to Remember:

- ⇒ The Bible is not just an anthology of favourite sayings. It is composed of blocks of history, poetry, prophetic messages and real letters to real people. When we study a passage we should be careful to put the passage in the context of the chapter, the chapter in the context of the book, and the book in the context of the whole Bible message.

- ⇒ Because the Bible is composed of different types of literature, we should pay due attention to what type of literature we are studying. For example the way we understand poetry is different to the way we interpret history.
- ⇒ Read the passage through several times to get the big picture.
- ⇒ Try to avoid jumping straight to application (even if it seems obvious) before you have worked out *what* the author means you to apply. This can be hard work and is often why it gets missed out, but if we know *what* we're applying and *why* we're applying it then our Bible study becomes about engaging in a relationship with God instead of listening to Him moralising at us.
- ⇒ Make a note of any surprises, any repeated ideas or words, any explanatory words such as 'but' or 'therefore' or 'because' etc. They will help you to work out the main ideas and the flow of the passage.
- ⇒ Try to divide the passage up into sections and give each section a title that reflects its content - in the same way that many Bible translations do. However, try to ignore the Bible translator's headings and divisions and work out your own. You may think the passage breaks up into several smaller sections or that the big arguments are slightly different from the ones the translators have identified. This is real brain-aching work, but it is well worth it because it forces us to engage with the text and helps us to avoid being side tracked by issues that really are not the main point of the passage.
- ⇒ Once you have worked out *what* the passage is saying you need to work on the *why* questions. *Why* does the passage say what it does, *why* does it say it here and *why* does it say it in this way. Only then will you be able to move onto apply it faithfully

Application

This is the point of asking *why* questions. Only when you have worked out why certain people, at a certain time, in a certain place, need to hear what God has told them can you work out what the warning, truth or instruction is for us today. Therefore...

- ⇒ Always ask what would the application have been for the original hearers before applying a passage to our lives. Sometimes a passage applies directly to us, but often we have to work out what the underlying or timeless principle is, which we then apply to our circumstances today. For example, Paul says in 2 Timothy 4:9 'Do your best to come to me quickly,' He is not asking the physically impossible of us – to go back in time to be with him in Rome, nor is he commanding from us some strange mystical unity of mind and purpose. No, he has written a letter to Timothy asking Timothy to join him in Rome as quickly as he can because everyone else has deserted him. The underlying principle would seem to be that it is not good even for such faithful warriors as Paul to be alone in their ministry.
- ⇒ Always apply the passage to your own life before applying it to the lives of others!
- ⇒ Ask yourself...
 - Is there a command requiring active obedience?
 - Is there a rebuke requiring humble repentance?
 - Is there information requiring clear thinking?

- Is there a question requiring hard thinking?
- Is there a comfort requiring active trust?
- Is there a description of God requiring worship of him?
- Is there a prayer requiring a similar response?

⇒ Beware of ‘discovering’ applications that have nothing whatever to do with the passage, or have tenuous links or are really off the main point. This is where good Bible study really comes into its own.

...And Afterwards

Encourage the members of your CSNM group to reflect on the impact that this study has had on their day-to-day lives in lectures and on the wards:

- Has it made any difference at all, or did it go in one ear and out the other side? (Don't be discouraged – this does occasionally happen!! Try to work out *why*.)
- Has it made life easier or more challenging? How can we support one another through the challenges?
- How has it affected our nursing or midwifery practice?
- How has it affected the way we think about certain aspects of nursing or midwifery?
- Has it shown us a Christian foundation for some of the things we are taught and do, or has it shown us the need to challenge or redefine some of our professional principles?
- How can we go on being challenged and grow in this area?
- Praise God together, thanking Him for the way He has been teaching and changing you, and asking for His ongoing help in all situations.

Bible Study Resources

Postcard from Palestine, A Reid, The Good Book Company (1989)

The Bible With Pleasure, S Motyer, Crossway Books (1990)

Bible Study Booklets available from IVP:

Joy in Suffering, D. Lambert

Mourning, B. Bruno

Work, B. Patterson

Kindness, P. J. Le Peau

Love, P. Scazzero

Patience, S. Eyre

Study Booklets available from Nurses Christian Fellowship International: www.welcome.to/NCFI

Handbook for Caring People

Resources for Caring People

Caring for People in Conflict

Caring for People in Grief

Caring for Emotional Needs

Caring for Physical Needs

Caring for Spiritual Needs

NB: Even when using Bible Study booklets like the ones listed above, try to spend some time doing your own study of the suggested passages first – this will deepen your own understanding and is a useful check on the author's understanding of the passage too!