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WELCOME TO "CONNEXIONS - THE BIBLE WORKSHOPS"

These Bible Workshops have been prepared as tools to help introduce the "ConneXions" process on which the Church embarked in 2002. Although they are published in time for Lent 2003, the six sessions could be used at any period in the Church year.

The aim of "ConneXions" is to enable every Methodist congregation to reflect even more of the life of Christ through its worship and witness. The Workshops invite you to begin a journey of exploration, for yourself and your Church, starting just where you are.

In conventional Bible study a leader delivers the teaching. For ConneXions, we have opted for a workshop style, in which each person may participate vocally or silently. To use the gathered time effectively, it is important for the leader to be familiar with the Bible passages and to think about how best to use the workshop material. Every member should read and mark the scripture sections for easy reference.

The workshops were prepared by teams and have been edited into a consistent format, by the invention of  approach study! Each workshop has seven sections (including references to the Appendix), to be worked through and each "@ " gives a clue about the content.

@DVANCE...

This section tells you what you should do before the workshop. Usually there are scripture readings, and occasionally things to think about, or to bring.

@SK...

is often an invitation to pray, or to begin a short discussion on a theme related to the study.

@UDIO...

is an opportunity to listen to the passages being read. Different ways of doing this are suggested.

@NSWER...

the questions laid out for discussion. There are plenty of these, and the leader/group will sometimes have to choose from different options.

@CTIVITY...

takes the workshop to the next natural stage. It may involve something to do, more discussion, prayer or a decision to be made.

@FTERS...

invites a conclusion to the workshop which may be a prayer, song or hymn.

@PPENDIX...

some essential, and some optional, material at the end of each chapter. Well worth using!

It is the writers' belief that as you engage prayerfully, in the ways suggested, you will be surprised at how the Spirit of the Lord shows you new things and prompts actions that will make a difference to your life and the lives of others around you. Gratitude is expressed for the contributions each team has made and the promptness with which they carried out their work.

May God bless your encounters together.


On behalf of the Connexions Steering Group
David Kerr, Elaine Barnett, Des Bain
(Chairman) (Convenor) (Facilitator)

Some more notes for leaders

These workshops take up some of the main themes of the ConneXions process:- pilgrimage, worship development, vision, witness, the social implications of the gospel, and the need for Church order.

Some people in a Bible Study group, can be delighted by the opportunity to add regularly to their knowledge of scripture and will hope to implement it in life. Of course, this is an important way to grow in Christ. However, for many people the Bible is a big and daunting library! Maybe this is why only a small minority of people today seem to believe the Bible is relevant.

You may be using these workshops with a regular Study Group, or it may be that as a special series it is an exploration for a wider group within the Church. So it is important to be aware who is attending this series and what are their expectations and apprehensions? The Workshops should be made as "user friendly" as possible. It might be an idea to start, rather than end with a cuppa, just to help folk relax. It is the intention of the authors to help people approach the Bible from their own life experiences. As such it may be different from the way you normally do Bible Study, so you may find the following comments helpful.

- 1 Leaders need to be careful to encourage those participating in the workshop to read the passages and prepare background material before coming. This is especially important before the first workshop and is described under . However, it may be necessary to give space at the start each time, for those who need to catch up!
- 2 You do not have to follow the order of the @'s religiously, but there is a sequence to them! For example, you may want to have some praise, do announcements or pray earlier than is suggested in the workshop, so this may mean making ASK your starting point. Because scripture is God-breathed, His Spirit alone interprets his truth to us. Small groups might offer a short prayer or have moments of silence to ask for His help as they begin each short exercise.
- 3 We realise there is a lot of Biblical and discussion material, so don't be afraid to select what is the most challenging for your situation AND/OR subdivide the group into smaller workshops. Each one can then talk through a different section, and (maybe) report back. This has the advantage of helping quieter members to participate and, of course, shares out the work. Reporting back to the whole group can strengthen both the fellowship and understanding for everyone.

- 4 Remember that no Bible reading is neutral! Everyone brings his/her own experience, cultural background and what he/she has been taught on previous occasions. This means there are fewer "right" answers to some questions than we may have often thought! For example, in the one passage of scripture which forms the basis for two of the workshops (John 4), question the assumptions often made about the woman at the well. "Do you think she was a thoroughly immoral person?" Most of us assume so. But ask the question, "What grounds could there be for a woman to be married and divorced five times?" The only legal justification was if the woman was childless. Without a child produced soon after marriage, divorce could be rapid. *If* this was true for her, *then* doesn't our perception of her morality change? Was she "forced" to seek the protection of her present partner? We may become more sympathetic towards this woman who would have been considered by her neighbours as not so much immoral, but worse, "cursed by God". Therefore isn't Jesus taking an even bigger risk by speaking to her?
- 5 The Bible is mostly about people whose experiences echo, however faintly, with the experiences of people today. (We all know what the neighbours would say about the prodigal son and his father!) By encouraging folk to share what seems ordinary in their lives, the text will begin to live for the group.
- 6 Discovering what a passage probably meant to those who first heard it, helps us understand what its relevance may be for us today. However, Bible study is not effective unless it goes two steps beyond understanding. This happens when we accept the following two challenges, "Having heard what the Bible is saying to me/us, what am I/we going to do about it?" AND "Who is going to help me/us do it?"

Because workshops 4&5 share a common Bible resource it is important to examine them both before deciding how to approach workshop four. There is a good deal of material which can be used and it is worth spending some time deciding how best to use it and what has to be omitted.

Your workshops do not have to reach tidy conclusions every time. They should however stimulate further discussion, and hopefully decisions, within the life of the congregation. Is it not reasonable to assume that we are as likely to hear God direct us in the Biblical and prayerful exercises of the Church, as we hope he does in the debate of the Quarterly Meeting?

Finally, please do use the ConneXions Prayer Folder which was circulated to your Church last year (2002) and read again the first sections of the Report which contain the vision and recommendations most pertinent to the local Church. (Pages 1-8)



The Bible sections for this Workshop all tell how the Hebrew slaves complained to Moses and doubted God, during their Exodus from Egypt.

The passages are; **Exodus Chapter 15; verses 22-26, Chapter 16; verses 2-31. Chapter 17 verses 1-7. Numbers Chapter 13 (all of it!) and Chapter 14 verses 1-25. Finally, Exodus 32; 1-6.**

- The word "pilgrimage" or the phrase "life's journey" are both popular expressions which we use to describe the pattern of our life experiences. This is true even among some who claim no religious faith. "Journeying" is however, a rich biblical theme; Abraham, the Exodus, the Exile, St Paul's missionary exploits and, of course Jesus, who "set his face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem", are all on such journeys or pilgrimages. We have chosen to study some events from the Exodus journey of the Hebrew slaves to help you reflect on your own personal journey and also on that of your church.


- Try to find a picture which speaks to you of a person/people making a journey, and bring it along to the workshop.



*"Called to Prayer" by Maureen Edwards (Pilgrimage section pp 66-76) has helpful prayers OR you could use Psalm 121, with half the group reading the first part of each verse and the other half responding with the second part. Then use the following prayer.

"Lord, we are facing new opportunities, we know that in setting out the pathway will not be smooth or easy and that there will be times of despair as well as days of delight. Grant us your grace to persevere through our difficulties; help us to be thankful in all our joys and build us in faith so that we will always walk believing you are holding us. So trusting you, may we enter your Kingdom of love." Amen



Before sharing the Bible material, take time to ponder two pieces of literature, one from 10th Century and the other from 20th Century. These are in  pp4-5 The Leader should ask two people to prepare to read these two pieces and the group should reflect on the questions.



The Bible Passages

The Exodus story has been chosen because it describes how God leads his people from bondage to freedom. Along the way, He transforms them from a collection of individuals into a cohesive community bound in covenant with their liberating God, able to move into a new land together.

Here is an opportunity to divide into three smaller groups, each one considering one of the following different sections and sharing their findings.

a) Exodus 15:22-26, 16:2-31, 17:1-7

The Israelites were not happy with their lot and they complained! With selective memory they forgot the pain of slavery and recalled only the sure provision of food in Egypt. Isn't it true that sometimes we would rather live in familiar bondage than venture into unknown freedom?

What do we grumble about in the Church? Think about the familiar bondage in which you, and we as a Church, often prefer to live. In the way you observe God responding to the Israelites, what may He be saying to you and the Church about His provision for the pilgrimage and about trusting Him?

b) Numbers 13, 14:1-25

The displayed lack of faith by the Israelites, whilst forgiven by God, cost them 40 years in the wilderness. A whole generation lost its chance to see the Lord's promise fulfilled and their dreams realised. Out of the 12 spies, only 2 believed that the God who had made the promise and inspired the 'dream', would also equip and provide the resources to fulfil the promise and realise the 'dream.'

Put yourself in the place of the spies. Maybe you are a cautious, or an adventurous person by nature. Would you tend to be one of the 10 who doubted or one of the 2 who believed and trusted?

In what way does fear of the unknown, the desire to do only what you can control and fear of your own inadequacy prevent you from moving forward on your journey into your 'promised land?'

What visions has God given you for the Church?

How does God equip His people to realise their dreams and visions?

What might be the outcome for the Church if we allow fear and lack of trust to determine our actions? Alternatively, what might be the outcome for the Church if we were all like Caleb and Joshua?

c) Exodus 32:1-6

Despite their meticulous preparation according to God's instructions the people were still poorly prepared to hear what God had to say to them and to receive His instructions about how to live on the journey. They could not wait, trust and obey, so they made and worshiped an idol - a golden calf! The redeeming message of this passage is that God forgave the Israelites their immense collective wickedness and allowed them to start on their journey again!

Can you name the idols we worship today?

In your life what takes precedence over God?

In what ways do you see impatience, disobedience and lack of trust in the Church community today, and how does this impede progress on the pilgrimage?

Think about the ways in which the Methodist Church in Ireland needs to 'start again' and how might 'ConneXions' be the means?



In the light of your discussions, share the photographs around the group and invite people to say (if they wish) what the picture conveys to them.



Use Hymn 450 in Hymns & Psalms as a reflective meditation.

"So every day

We're on our way

For we're a travelling, wandering race,

We're the People of God."



Brendan's Prayer on the Mountain

Shall I abandon, O King of Mysteries, the soft comforts of home?

Shall I turn my back on my native land, and my face towards the sea?

Shall I put myself wholly at the mercy of God, without silver, without a horse, without fame and honour?

Shall I throw myself wholly on the King of kings, without sword and shield, without food and drink without a bed to lie on?

Shall I say farewell to my beautiful land, placing myself under Christ's yoke?

Shall I pour out my heart to him, confessing my manifold sins and begging forgiveness, tears streaming down my cheeks?

Shall I leave the prints of my knees on the sandy beach, a record of my final prayer in my native land?

Shall I then suffer every kind of wound that the sea can inflict?

Shall I take my tiny coracle across the wide, sparkling ocean?

O King of the Glorious Heaven, shall I go of my own choice upon the sea?

O Christ, will you help me on the wild waves?

Taken from Celtic Fire compiled by Robert van de Weyer, published and copyright 1990 by Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd, and used by permission of the publishers.'

Hope

*It helps, now and then, to step back
and take the long view.
The kingdom is not only beyond our efforts,
it is beyond our vision.*

*We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of
the magnificent enterprise that is God's work.
Nothing we do is complete,
which is another way of saying
that the kingdom always lies beyond us.*

*No statement says all that could be said.
No prayer fully expresses our faith.
No confession brings perfection.
No pastoral visit brings wholeness.
No program accomplishes the church's mission.
No set of goals and objectives includes everything.*

*This is what we are about:
We plant seeds that one day will grow.
We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise.
We lay foundations that will need further development.
We provide yeast that produces effects beyond our capabilities.*

*We cannot do everything
and there is a sense of liberation in realising that.
This enables us to do something,
and to do it very well.
It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way,
an opportunity for God's grace to enter and do the rest.*

*We may never see the end results,
but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker.
We are workers, not master builders,
ministers, not messiahs.
We are prophets of a future not our own. Amen.*

Oscar A Romero (Archbishop of El Salvador, assassinated March 24, 1980, while celebrating the Eucharist).

Pause for thought..

Take a few minutes to discuss what fears or disappointments do detect and how are they counteracted? What do they say to you about your own sense of journeying on your spiritual life?

*Methodist Publishing House, Peterborough compiled by Maureen Edwards 2001.
Available from "No9 Resource Centre", Edgehill College.



During a worship service... try to list the different elements of worship. (You may have a printed order in your Church which does it for you!!)
Do you think anything could or should be added/taken away? You will have opportunity in the workshop to add or subtract from these.

Before you come read the following sections **Deuteronomy 6:5-6, John 4:23-24, Romans 12:1-2, Colossians 3:1-17**




Spend a few moments in silence (enough to be uncomfortable!), then one person should read **Isaiah 6:1-8** aloud.
Briefly share with the group a time when you feel God met you, in worship, in a significant way.



Different people read aloud the passages: **Deuteronomy 6: 5-6, John 4: 23-24, Romans 12: 1-2, Colossians 3: 1-17**



John Wesley, having boasted about his brother Charles' excellent song lyrics in the preface to his new hymn book in 1780, went on to write, "That which is of infinitely more moment than the spirit of poetry, is the spirit of piety" - what does this mean for us today?

How do these passages help us define the sort of worship God requires?
Write down the elements you think should or could be included in a worship service.
See 

Here are some verses to look at after you've run out of ideas:

Psalm 46:10	Acts 2:42-45
Psalm 51:10-12, 15-17	1 Corinthians 11:23-26
Psalm 63:4	Ephesians 5:19
Psalm 95:1-2,6	1 Timothy 2:1-2
Psalm 119:	2 Timothy 3:16
Psalm 150	

In what order should these elements come? Who should be involved in these parts? What prior preparation do you think is needed to a)lead these parts and b) participate in them?



The Worship is Over - the Service Begins!
In what ways do you think God may speak in worship?
If you believe you have heard him, was it during a particular part of the meeting?
How did you respond?
What difference did it make in your daily life?

Has the group any suggestions for the Worship Committee?
If there are ideas for inclusion in Sunday Worship, what might be the best way to introduce them, remembering that most people in the congregation will not have shared (presumably!) in your discussion?



If you have a musician in the group, you could sing "When the music fades" by Matt Redman on "The Heart of Worship".(See Appendix 2) Or listen to it from a CD player - contact the 'No 9 Resource Centre' to find a suitable version.



How true do you think these statements are? Score on a scale of 1-5 but refer first to the thought provokers at the end of this section!

<i>'The Old Testament is all about law, the New Testament is about love.'</i>						
<i>False</i>	1	2	3	4	5	<i>True</i>
<i>"If people kept the Ten Commandments, everything else would fall into place"</i>						
<i>False</i>	1	2	3	4	5	<i>True</i>
<i>"The Old Testament shows the standards for the governing of the country, but the New Testament is about how the Church should live."</i>						
<i>False</i>	1	2	3	4	5	<i>True</i>
<i>'Social Justice is something for somebody else to worry about, we just get on with worshipping faithfully here in our church'</i>						
<i>False</i>	1	2	3	4	5	<i>True</i>

THOUGHT PROVOKERS.

- *Matt. 5:17. The Law was not just a set of rules, but rather a guide to the right way of living and how we should relate to the rest of society. It was intended to keep followers in a right relationship with God and other people. "You shall not steal" means "If you live as God wants, then you will not steal anything from anyone"*
- *In the Bible "righteousness", is used in two different but related senses. First, it means 'right living', or 'living in a right relationship with God and other people'. This is pleasing to God. Secondly, it is the restoring of right relationships between people when one had wronged the other - and thus restoring justice to the community. Look at Isaiah 58:11-9a; Amos 5:21-24; Micah 6:6-8*
- *Jesus emphasised this approach over and over again. Look to the story of the Good Samaritan, or The parable of the Sheep and Goats, or his teaching in Matthew 23; What other passages can you think of?*

Worship is only complete when we combine it with concern and action in relation to social needs and injustices.

So....

in the light of what Jesus, along with Amos and the other prophets said, do you think God is pleased with our worship here and now?

John Wesley believed that not only had the gospel to be preached, it had to be lived. So alongside evangelism, Methodism has stressed the importance of social action and the search for justice as an integral part of our Christian life and witness. The first Methodist church buildings in Ireland included, a preaching house, dwellings for preachers, an orphanage, a school, a home for widows and a bookshop. This is what "Church" meant for Wesley. After what we have looked at, it should be clear that every local congregation should work out how God is calling you to live the gospel, in a manner that is appropriate to your own context.

Your notes

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How do we apply this Biblical and Wesleyan message in our own local situation?

Some questions to help us think about this: -

- *Is there anything in our heritage that makes the wrongs in society of particular concern to the Methodist church?*
- *How could more issues of justice and righteousness be made a part of our Offering of Worship*
- *What wrongs need to be addressed in your particular area?*
To help you think about this question, perhaps use the questions:
What? Why? How? When?
- *Is there anything we can do about wrongs in the wider world?*
- *Is there still a danger of identifying too closely with one particular political, economic or social structure today?*



A closing prayer;

Prayer Focus day 8

Transforming God, Maker of a new heaven and a new earth; bring to society a new awareness of your purpose. Lead us - from separation to togetherness; from doubt and despair to faith and hope, from exploitation to justice and from narrow vision to open horizons, from condemnation to acceptance. Let our society be a new sign of your Kingdom, where brokenness gives way to wholeness and forgiveness is the path to new life. Make Ireland a tapestry of loving action and reconciled lives. In the name of Jesus, the wounded healer, we pray. Amen (Rev David Cooper)

VISION

WORKSHOP FOUR

“Vision is the world’s most desperate need. There are no hopeless situations, only people who think hopelessly.” (Winifred Newman.)



- Cut out some newspaper pictures or headlines depicting areas into which you would find it hard to venture, either in person or in the attitudes that are prevalent.
- Read **John 4; 1-42** in more than one translation, if possible.
- Read also on page 12, which gives some background to the story.
- Jesus saw fields ready for harvesting - where others saw only wasteland. The Disciples went to get food - he found food they never saw. The woman came for water, their father Jacob gave them the water - Jesus spoke about living water. The woman wanted to debate about worship in man-made temples - Jesus spoke about something far more glorious: worshipping God in spirit and truth. Others saw a shamed woman - Jesus saw a possible missionary of the Kingdom.
- Take some time to dream: “If only our Church
- What may God be saying to you?



ConneXions is more about people than about programmes and changing structures. Our vision is for a Christ-like attitude to all people.

A suggested prayer to be said together or silently, “Lord, you loved me and saw the great worth in me before anyone else did. Anoint my eyes and my heart so that I may really see others and love them as you do. Remind me that each individual is of far more value to you than all the church buildings in the land.”



John 4 :1-42

This passage appears twice in this workbook (here and on Witness). It is suggested that you refer to the p12&17 to consider which method of reading together you might use on each occasion.



It is suggested that the group sub-divides into three and each group considers one of these sections.

a) Jesus was a man of vision.

- What form did his “vision” take and what enabled him to see further than others?
- Vision is accompanied by risk - what did Jesus risk? If a man is known by the company he keeps, what might the villagers think of him?
- Jesus uses the most unlikely people as the heroes. The disciples were a mixed bunch. Could “the wrong sort” ever represent your community? Is this why we often don’t cut much ice with our modern “Sychars”?
- What risks might he be asking us to take?

b) The Disciples lacked vision.

- Put yourself in the place of the Disciples. What did they see as they returned to Sychar? What did they fail to see?
- Could Jesus have sent them away on purpose? Why?
- How would they feel about his not eating their food and his words from verse 31 onwards?
- In what ways do we run after false food? Do lesser things too easily distract us?
- Assuming that this was a teaching session set up by Jesus: what was he attempting to teach? What would they have learned?

c) Jesus gave the woman a new vision.

- How do you think men and women in Sychar saw this woman before she met Jesus, and what might be different about the way she felt Jesus looked on her?
- Now she saw the people who despised her in a new light. Have you experienced that new believers are often the best witnesses? Why is this?
- Could it be that the most important thing in the entire Connexions Programme is the way we see others? Jesus sees value and potential where others see sin and emptiness.
- What would it mean to your fellowship to walk down the street and “see” people as God sees them?



Do we value “sinners”?

- Think of negative and positive experiences.
- In what ways do peoples’ outward appearances, or reputations, influence how we treat them?
- Is there someone you need to apologise to? Will you?

Use slips of paper to write down your sins of omission and commission in this regard. These could then be placed in a pot and burned as silent confession is made and forgiveness received. Many have found this profoundly moving. We waste our time if our Bible Study is only a polite sharing of ideas!

AND / OR

In smaller groups of 3 or 4 consider; -

- How can we learn to “think outside the box”? see
- What are the things that hinder vision?
- Can God really call *anyone* to his work? *Those who are despised?*
- In your area, what is your modern “Sychar”? The no-go areas for you or your Church.
- Are there some “impossible” areas to which God is calling us?

To help with the discussion, use your Newspaper headlines. Members should put them all together in a pile and then pick out from the bunch what others have brought. What of the youth pub-culture? Are there Christians from a different tradition? An immigrant community? People of other faiths?

Ask each member of the group to pick out a picture or headline that they find particularly disturbing. Why is it disturbing? (Be prepared to do some probing, and wait for the answers!)

• Is there someone in your group who feels that someone **must do something** in response to the newspaper headlines? If we had unlimited resources, what might God want us to do? We cannot do everything. Let the group decide what it is they can do.

It is painful to move out of the safety zone - and think outside the box. Can anyone in the group share an experience of doing this, or failing to do it!



A possible ending to the study on John 4:

There are risks involved in the ConneXions journey. It is going to cost us something, and we will all make mistakes. Some will dig in their heels: "Why should I change some of the beloved traditions in my Church?" Only when I'm convinced that these same traditions may be hindering the work of Christ will the pain of change be acceptable. The gain must be seen to be worth the pain!

Ask the members to sit alone before God and ask: "If I took this passage seriously, what changes would I have to make in my life?" End the session with shared prayer.



Background information on John 4

Jesus didn't **have** to go through Samaria, he chose to do so! There was another way around and he could have avoided facing the tensions that existed between Jews and Samaritans. When Northern Israel with its capital at Samaria fell to the Assyrians in 850 B.C. many Jews were deported to Assyria, and foreigners settled the land. (2 Kings 17;24) They intermarried with the Jews, which was against Jewish law. This mixed race was impure in the opinion of Jews who lived in Judah, the Southern Kingdom. Therefore, Samaritans were hated because they had betrayed their people and nation. The Jews did everything they could to avoid travelling through Samaria. But Jesus refused to live by such cultural taboos and felt he had to go directly through Samaria, en route to the North. Jesus chose to break through this traditional barrier and met a woman at Sychar. (see also para 4 in leaders notes, pp2) [There are many parallels with the Protestant/Catholic divisions today]



- Bible Study suggestions for Vision and Witness

Larger groups might break up in different sections with each one using a different way of reading the story. If possible a variety of new translations should be used. Each group should invite God to give "fresh eyes" to read it as if for the very first time. The Holy Spirit just might take it off in a different direction!

- 1 Dramatised reading; One person reads the narrative and Different people read the words of the people involved.
- 2 Read aloud, allowing people in the group to read a few verses each, but without planning so that there is a period of silence between each section read.
- 3 Get each person to read in silence, looking for at least one "new" thing.
- 4 Read quietly asking each person to decided with whom he/she identifies in the passage and why? How do you feel about the others in the passage?
- 5 Using the sheet pp17 listen to the passage being read and imagine yourself sitting as an observer at the well. Fill in the auto-shapes according to how your senses respond.



We return to the passage used last week **John 4:1-42**. See if you can find another translation to use in preparation this week.

People influence people! Just think about all the people who have influenced your life for good or bad. We all influence someone. Think of those who intentionally or otherwise, have had a major effect on your life.

If we deliberately seek to make connections and influence others, we will be investing in people, and become contagious Christians. In this bible story Jesus makes a connection and influences a woman's life. She in turn changes a community. This gives us a model to discover our own points of contact, so that our witness as individuals and as a Church can be enhanced.

Refer to the again, for background to this passage. After reading, ask yourself, or recall from the previous workshop "Who or where is your Samaria and what barriers prevent you from witnessing and making connections there?" Can you imagine travelling through your Samaria, with Jesus, in order to make connections?



Lord we ask you to lead us now, gently but firmly, that our vision may prompt us to share our faith with others. Free us from prejudice and fear of people so that we will be willing and ready to minister to them by your grace



Refer to the p12 where there are suggestions for reading the passage in a group. It might be helpful to use "The Message."

OR use the meditation "To Provoke" which has been written especially for this study at p15



Break into 4 smaller groups to discuss the relationships outlines below. After discussion, the groups should come together to share what they have discovered.

1. Jesus and the woman v1-26

Exactly what was the point of contact? (vv 6-9) What smoke screens did she put up? What point(s) of contact do you have with people? Share together what some of the smoke screens might be.

2. Jesus and the disciples v 27-38:

Our touching people could take us into areas of controversy, especially in our divided society. So how does this make you feel?

Our work of witness is sometimes sowing and sometimes reaping. We need our eyes opened to see where Jesus is presenting is with the opportunities. Looking back over the week were there opportunities to share your faith? How did you take them, or felt that you failed to take them?

3. The woman and her community v 29,30:

The people knew this woman's story well. They felt her excitement in meeting someone who knew all about her. Such was the impact of this encounter that they had to come and see for themselves. This is a very important part of evangelism and we need to ask the question. Has Jesus made such an impact on my life that people notice? Am I a contagious Christian?

4. The community and Jesus v 40-42:

There is no such thing as piggyback faith. Faith needs to be owned by every individual and communities need to have living vibrant faith John Wesley said that the true church is a place where living faith is seen and the emphasis was on living faith. People should be encouraged to come and see for themselves.

Is our Church a place people want to come to or stay away from? Would our place of worship be somewhere that people see enough of Christ to begin to discover him for themselves?

@CTIVITY...

Think 'ConneXions'! That is, put your Church in the position of the woman, the disciples and Jesus by asking the following questions;
 Where is your Church being touched by Jesus?
 What are the points of contact between your Church and the community?
 How does your Church infect the wider community?
 Where do you think you see Jesus at work outside the Church?
 Do you see other Churches doing what you would like to do?

@FTERS...

Share in a time of open prayer-

- to find places of contact in the places you meet people.
- for eyes to see the opportunities.
- to have courage to cross those places of controversy to make connections.
- to be contagious Christians so that people take notice and want to discover Christ for themselves.

Our lives are an open book by which we can tell a love story of how God has changed us and people see it or it can be a horror story of lies and deceit. Often people are good at saying things but actions fail to back up what is said. The women told her community, and people saw the evidence so they came to discover for themselves. Our Christian faith must be acted out in our connecting with people in loving service. Spend the next week doing something with what you have in Christ. As you pray, ask God for a vision. Dream of people being won for Christ. Encourage someone to come along to a service or invite them to coffee, or a big Mac. Look for points of contact. Remember Jesus wants to have people drink of him, the life-giving water. Lets live his excitement so people will see the connection we have with the Source of Life.

Bibliography

Becoming a Contagious Christian - Bill Hybells, How to give away your faith - Paul Little, Searching Issues - Nicky Gumbel

@PPENDIX 6

TO PROVOKE - 1 (accompanying soft music can help as you read this)

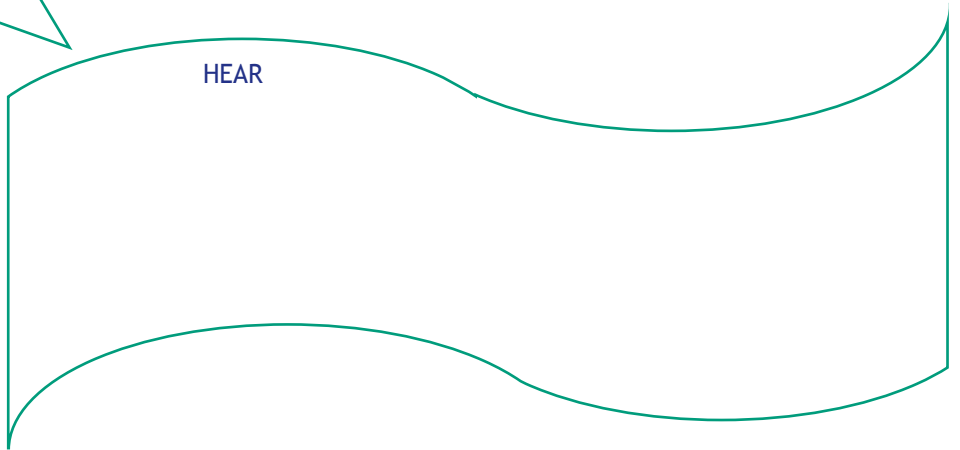
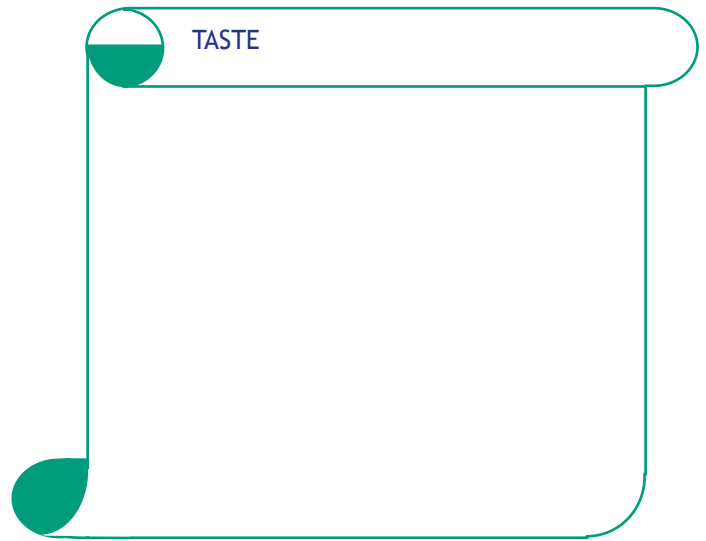
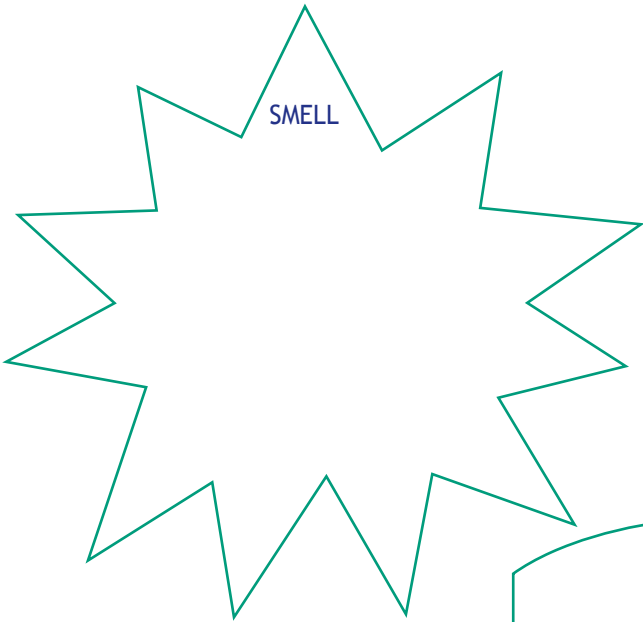
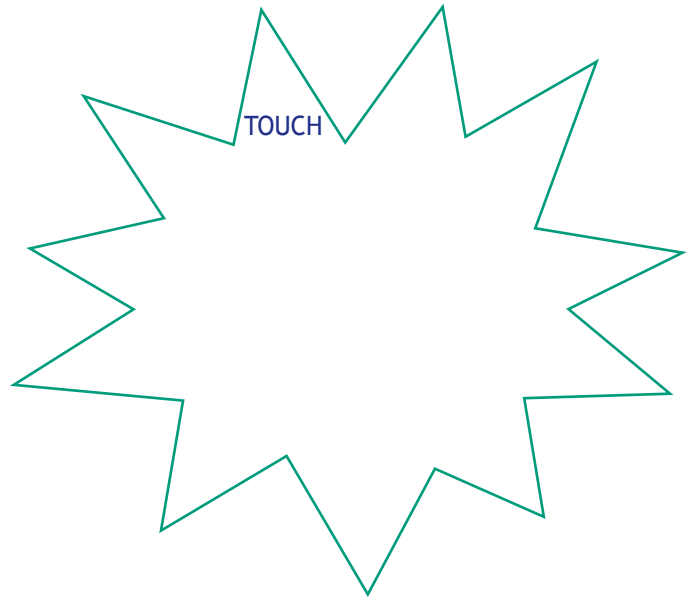
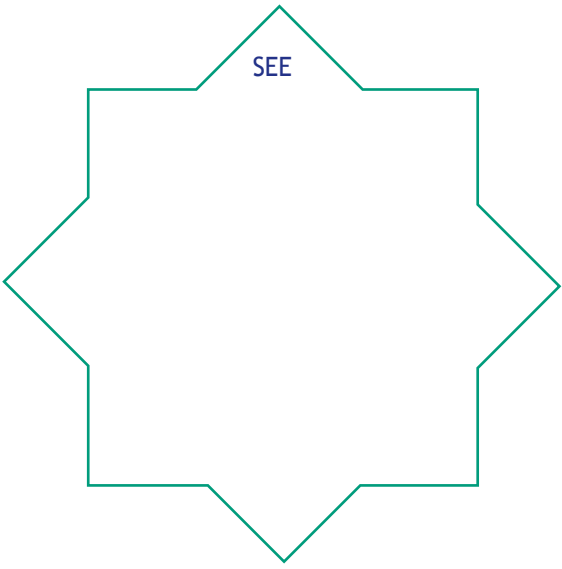
The woman in this story goes through a process ... she has a journey. She begins on her own, self-sufficient, not letting her reputation drag her down, going to the well as she has done many many times before. It's the expected norm. It's recognised as 'what she does.'
 She meets Jesus there.
 Things begin to change.
 She thinks, this man is different. He has 'a way' about him. Something, that as he engages with her, tells her what he says is worth listening to. She may have been wary, but she engages back. He makes an offer, 'Life -giving water', she responds. Jesus begins to break down the barriers.
 The barrier of culture, the barrier of history, the barrier of expectation. Smash, smash, smash - her defenses are breaking. And she does not even know it. Because, he engages with her.
 She begins to get excited with new prospects.
 She begins to see that maybe 'the way things are', 'the expected norm,' are not the way things need to be forever.
 Jesus continues to engage her spirit.
 The woman senses that this is a different kind of man. A special man.
 But then, just as she feels this is a special moment, something mysterious and unexplainable perhaps, Jesus drops the bomb.
 'Go tell your husband.'

Her heart stops. Her stomach sinks, her palms sweat and her head begins to spin.
'I have no husband.' she mutters.
'I know' Jesus replies.
She looks up, amazed, scared. Waiting for the next sentence. Interested again.
'You've had 5. And the man you are now with, he's not even your husband. You told the truth.'
The second bomb.
She had felt hopeful - she could not remember the last time she felt hopeful. she had sensed something different in the air. And it had been cruelly taken away.
She felt a failure, unloved, used, abused and worthless. And this man knew all about it. The special man, how did he know?
She thought it better to stop there.
She was hurting and this man pointed to her hurt.
She felt weak.
She musters her strength and changes the conversation - it was better than saying nothing.
'I can tell your a bit special,' she was saying, 'a prophet?'
'so where do you think we need to worship?'
Back to the cultural barrier.
Back to the historical barrier.
Back to the mistrust, mocking and hatred between these two nations.
Thank God, he does not let it stop there. He explains that it does not matter, God wants anyone, anywhere to worship him with their deepest selves. and that included her.
She came back on track. She opens herself once more to the mystery.
And the Messiah is revealed.
She knew.
This time she knew.
For the woman, the journey of the encounter was rough. It started normal, it changed to exciting, it then moved to terrible discomfort, before turning into a life changing moment.
How will it be for you face to face with the master? Where do you meet Jesus? In the daily? In the adventure? In the pain of his healing our hurts? In the wildness of his love and acceptance?
How will it be for those to whom the master reveals himself through you?

TO PROVOKE - 2

Jesus has done an amazing thing. He changed the life of someone he 'bumped into' while taking a rest! The disciples come back and see him talking with a woman, whose life has just been absolutely turned round by the encounter.
This the stuff of mission. This is the very thing Jesus is training the disciples to do. This is the heart of the message - 'changed lives through meeting with Jesus.' And so naturally they rejoice, they celebrate that a woman has been changed in an incredible way.
No they don't.
They watch and they gossip amongst themselves, 'What's he doing talking to her? Why is he talking to a woman?'
But not one of them says anything to Jesus.
The disciples - the very people who should have understood what was going on, the very people who should have been used to Jesus by now, the very people who should have celebrated Jesus living and changing lives outside the box of normality. Those people didn't get it. And they gossiped about it. And no-one said a word to Jesus. In our churches, are we ready for Jesus to do amazing things? With young people? With the elderly? With homeless? With alcoholics and drug addicts? With our friends and families?
Will we join in, celebrate, marvel at what God is able to do, or will we talk about it behind Jesus's back?

@PPENDIX 5



Your notes _____



Think about who in your view has power and authority in your congregation/circuit/district. Can you find out how any other Church or denomination is governed?



Working in pairs or small groups draw a diagram to outline who you think is in charge of the different departments of the church, whether at a local or wider level. Try to be as specific as possible... Name names!

Who do you think has the power and authority in your congregation / circuit / district?

Who's in charge of the Methodist Church in Ireland?

What other models of church organisation and government do you know about?

Who is in charge in each of them? (eg. Anglican, Presbyterian, Brethren)

What would be your preferred model of organisation and government and why?

Discuss your findings together.



Ephesians 4: 1-16 and 1: 22-23

The New Testament does not contain a blueprint for church government or organisation. But it does offer some pictures of the church and some basic principles.

So who really is in charge? ...or should be?



The first mention of 'church' in the New Testament comes in **Matthew 16:13-20**. After Peter's confession of faith, Jesus talks about the foundation of the church. A lot of unprofitable time has been wasted debating what Jesus meant by saying he would build his church on "this rock." Read this passage together with **1 Peter 2:4-10** * to see how Peter himself understood this idea.

What do these passages suggest to you about the church?

Here, someone might read the short story at p20

* Peter draws a picture of the church as a building, but one made of living stones...

We have a tendency to think about the church as a solid structure, whether in terms of the bricks and mortar of a local church building or the immutable structures of the church organisation. But the church is a living, breathing, adapting organism, made up of living stones.

What is the difference between a building made of living stones and one of normal stones? Are there any risks in creating a building made of living stones?

The position of each stone in that building is determined by its relationship to the cornerstone. A cornerstone is the stone by which all the walls are judged to be truly vertical, or upright. The final arbiter of what is right in the life of the church is not the Manual of Laws, nor any other code of church practice, but rather Jesus Christ, the cornerstone. If we return to the image of the church as the body of Christ then Christ, the head of the church is the one who sets the standards.

First Principles of Order in the Church

What did the Head of the Church have to say about the conduct of the church?

For some basic principles, look at the following (maybe in small groups again, one group looking at each reference):

1. Matthew 18:15-17 **2. Matthew 20:24-283. Matthew 26:26-29**

4. John 17:20-26 **5. Acts 1:4-8**

Share your findings and summarise the basic principles.

How do you respond to these principles? Do you think they are important in your church?

In what way does the Holy Spirit (God's provision for the church) make a difference in the church - local or connexional?

Would it matter if the Holy Spirit was withdrawn? If so in what ways?



Look again at the passage in Ephesians 4: 1-16.

Imagine you are a group of trainee doctors doing a ward round with the consultant, Paul, when we come across the church at Ephesus. What illnesses could Paul be diagnosing and treating in this passage? Here are some possibilities: *Autoimmune diseases...* one part of the body is causing damage to another part because it does not recognise it as part of the body.

Wasting diseases... part of the body wastes away because of lack of use...

Growth Defects... the body does not grow and develop as it should.

Paraplegia... the body is powerless because for some reason it is not connected to the brain.

Digestive and Breathing Problems... the body is not receiving the energy and oxygen it needs to carry on "its works of service."

Any other?

In the next bed lies the Methodist Church in Ireland What is your diagnosis, and prescribed treatment

And in the next bed lies your local circuit or congregation Again, what is your diagnosis and treatment?

And on the bright side of life!

But let's not concentrate on the negative side. Different strengths are required for different jobs and environments: A sumo wrestler, needs to be massive, a sprinter lithe; a writer mainly uses his mind, a labourer his strength.

What strengths does the Methodist Church body exhibit, on a local and wider scale?

Does the church of today have the right characteristics to do the job required of it, which according to Paul is to carry out "works of service", or as Charles Wesley says "to serve the present age"? What do we need to work on?

None of us has a perfect body. And no church body is perfect. God still uses us, imperfect as we are. But just as someone who is ill should not put up with their medical condition if it can be cured by following a doctor's instruction, so the Church does not have to put up with its imperfections. As the American preacher and writer Max Lucado said of us as individuals:

"God loves you just the way you are... But he refuses to leave you that way... He wants you to be just like Jesus." (Just Like Jesus, Word Publishing 1998)

If that is true of us as individuals, it is also true of us as a church, the body of Christ. Paul writes to the Ephesians about maturity (v.13) and growth (vs15,16). We tend to associate growth with numbers. How would you describe the growth Paul mentions? A final question: *HOW do you think WE ARE GROWING?*



A prayer for the local Body of Christ:

O God our Father,

You grant us gifts so that together we may act as the body of your Son.

Help us to recognise those gifts and our important place in that body.

Breathe your Holy Spirit into us,

Bringing life to every part of your body, empowering us to serve you.

Grow in us so that we may grow in our knowledge of you and your ways,

and that your church may grow in grace, reflecting your glory for all to see:

a beautiful, fit and healthy body.

Lead those who lead us, may they lead as humble servants in the service of the King, and may we follow wherever you may lead.

In Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen

