



EXPLORING THE WORD AND THE WORLD



A collection of Bible Studies

Exploring the Word and the world
A collection of Bible studies

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Editor: Eliza Justice & Stephen Ney
Designer: Stéphane Hilaire Oupoh

EXPLORING THE WORD AND THE WORLD: A collection of Bible Studies

Recognizing the strategic value of this fruitful collaboration between the IFES Scripture Engagement (SE) and Engaging the University (ETU) teams, I highly encourage everyone who seeks deep, thought-provoking engagement with Scripture to use this collection of Bible studies. It can be used for either your time alone with God or for small group discussions. Listen and discern God's voice through these studies, individually or communally. Act upon what you hear. Invite others into listening and acting. This collection of Bible studies is a must-have tool designed by the best contributors representing the richness of cross-cultural teamwork and diversity in the IFES fellowship.

Olena Welch, IFES Head of Global Resource Ministries



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Introduction to the collection



INTRODUCTION TO THE COLLECTION

You might have wondered before: Why should I think about the Bible while I'm sitting in a lecture, studying for an exam, or participating in student life on campus? And how might I think about the Bible in a way that's relevant, or hopefully even attractive to those around me?

Or you might have wondered: How might what I'm learning at university actually help me learn more from the Bible, so that I can love the Lord more fully with my heart, my soul, my mind, and my strength?

If you're a student with such questions, or if you care about students who have such questions, we've designed this collection of Bible studies and resources for you. It is the fruit of a collaboration between the IFES Scripture Engagement (SE) and Engaging the University (ETU) teams.

Many of the following studies were initially developed as part of the Logos and Cosmos Initiative (LCI). This five-year IFES program (2020-2025) focuses on mentoring students, staff, and academics in Latin America and Francophone Africa, supporting them to lead projects in the university that foster dialogue between Theology and the Sciences (both social and natural).

LCI Catalysts are passionate about the questions posed above, and the LCI training has helped them to engage intensively with Scripture so they can engage Christianly with their universities. This scriptural engagement, as a form of Bible studies, explores where biblical texts intersect with the concerns of universities and academic disciplines. A sample of these studies, developed in consultation with the regional Scripture Engagement teams, and developed in French, Spanish, Portuguese, and English, are included in this resource as a gift to the broader fellowship. They are supplemented by studies written by Scripture Engagement (SE) and Engaging the University (ETU) leaders.

The LCI community has realised afresh, and in line with the fundamentals of our fellowship, that all IFES initiatives must be firmly anchored in Scripture. By observing this practice, we can be faithful to the Word and contextually relevant in our engagements with the world. This is not limited to certain parts of the fellowship. Every one of us is constantly navigating between the Word and the world, prayerfully seeking to remain faithful to God's message while acting as messengers of integrity, sent into the challenging contexts of the world's universities.

IFES is a diverse fellowship, and an extraordinary training ground on which to help each other grow in our engagement with both Scripture and the university. Together, we understand the Word better. Together, we serve the world better. We help each other recognize our many blind spots and rejoice as each of us gains new understanding and insight.

INTRODUCTION TO THE COLLECTION

It is our great joy and privilege to offer this fellowship the fruits of these collaborative efforts – voices of innovation that join together across countries, levels of expertise, and academic disciplines. While these observations are no final word on the Bible texts discussed, we hope you receive them as prompts for your own time of prayerful and contextually relevant reflection and action. Receive them as the gifts of the body of Christ serving together in God’s mission in universities.

In Christ,

Ricardo Borges, Secretary for Scripture Engagement

Timothée Joset, Engaging the University Coordinator

Stephen Ney, LCI Curriculum Manager

Bible study 1:
In search of wisdom



BIBLE STUDY 1 : IN SEARCH OF WISDOM



Ricardo Borges, Agronomist engineer and pastor, serving as Secretary of Scripture Engagement for IFES



Text: Ecclesiastes 12: 9-14

Introduction

Why do we study?

Which kind of wisdom does scientific work offer?

What do we achieve with this knowledge?

Is wisdom the same as knowledge?

What are we training for?

What are we going to do with our lives?

These questions sum up the challenges we face.

For Christian scientists, besides the need to find the path of wisdom, we need to discern what God is calling us to do with our vocation in society.

Why are we here ? What are the most important things in our lives?

How can the Wiseman, the Teacher of Ecclesiastes, help us with these questions?

By considering these questions, we will have the right attitude in all our scientific endeavors, in all we do at university or in all the work-related activities that we accomplish. By doing so, we will nurture and bring to fruition the common good, for the glory of God. This is the reason why we are trying to learn more and keep growing in our path of wisdom.



BIBLE STUDY 1: IN SEARCH OF WISDOM

Questions

- 1 *Before the epilogue at the end of the book of Ecclesiastes, there is a section (12:1-8) where we are reminded of the brevity of life. In the context of the pursuit of knowledge and wisdom, in what ways can it be useful for us to meditate on the brevity and finiteness of life?*

- 2 *In 12:9a we read: "Not only was the Teacher wise, but he also imparted knowledge to the people". What area did he develop or how did the Teacher grow to get there? What do we learn about his attitude?*

- 3 *What do you think about the skills of the Wise in 12:9b, "He pondered and searched out and set in order many proverbs"? How do these skills help us to become wise?*

- 4 *The Wise seems to order and to phrase his words with beauty and integrity (12:9-10). Why do you believe he is worried about his acts as the artist behaves with his work? Apart from aesthetics, why would the veracity of his words (12:10) be so important?*

- 5 *When we consider the impact of the Wise's work in the text, we can see that the result leads in a specific direction, as a shepherd leading his flock. How do you assess the transforming impact of your scientific research on people's lives or on your context? Which ethical considerations should we have regarding the results of our research?*

- 6 *How can we handle intellectual tasks which often seem endless or even the source of weariness (12:12) and vanity (12:8)? How real are these temptations to you? How do you handle them?*

BIBLE STUDY 1: IN SEARCH OF WISDOM

- 7 *The fear of God and obedience to his commands are presented as the most important criteria (12:13) in the assessment of knowledge and wisdom. Why do you think it is the most important? How do you apply it to your research/work?*
-

- 8 *The perspective of God's final judgment between good and evil is shown as the final horizon of life (12:14). Miroslav Volf tells us that "the key question for any public intellectual — for any human being as well, of course — is the moral ground on which to stand." [1]*

What is the moral basis of your scientific research? Which steps could you take to ensure that you're still building it on a good moral foundation?

Going further

The words of the Teacher in Ecclesiastes are a good warning and an encouragement to be stewards of the gifts and skills given to us by God. They make us realize that our search for wisdom involves more than simply accumulating knowledge, as important as it is to acquire a comprehensive understanding of reality.

His words also remind us that whatever we seek to accomplish in this world, must be done by using rightly our God-gifted knowledge. Only then will we bring honor and glory to our Lord in the final redemption of the whole creation, "in a new heaven and a new earth".

What can you celebrate in your own search for wisdom? Is there anything you would like to review? Which questions are you still pondering; what are the ideas that will help you grow?

[1] Miroslav Volf, "On Being a Christian Public Intellectual," in *Public Intellectuals and the Common Good: Christian Thinking for Human Flourishing*, eds. Todd C. Ream, Jerry Pattengale, and Christopher J. Devers (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2021).



Bible study 2:
Our attitudes towards
our studies



BIBLE STUDY 2 : OUR ATTITUDES TOWARDS OUR STUDIES



Josué Olmedo,

Odontologist, student of theology, staff member of the Logos and Cosmos Initiative team and member of IFES Latin America regional team



Text: Daniel 1:4-5, 17

Introduction

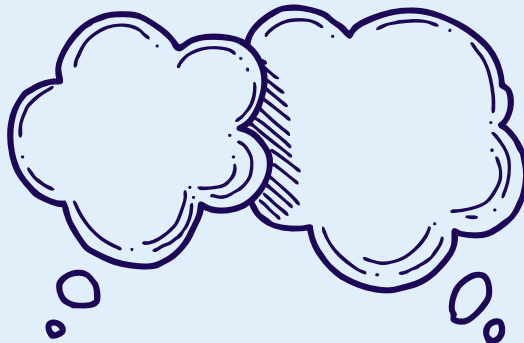
University students and professors take on their academic responsibilities with different attitudes. Take some time to reflect on how your closest classmates or professors behave towards their academic responsibilities. Write down your findings here and consider whether certain attitudes are more common than others.

You have surely found positive and negative attitudes regarding how people face their academic responsibilities. What do you think are the motivations behind those attitudes? Write down your thoughts.

What about your own attitude?

Identify some aspects of this. What is the motivation behind those attitudes?

The circumstances under which the young Daniel arrives in Babylon, to begin what we might today call his undergraduate education, are not promising. Daniel, alongside a group of Israelites, has been forcibly exiled from his homeland by a foreign nation. Daniel's world falls apart. He is then selected for a three-year training program which will qualify him for civilian service in the Babylonian Empire (Daniel 1:5).



BIBLE STUDY 2: OUR ATTITUDES TOWARDS OUR STUDIES

Questions

In the light of some biblical texts, let us characterize Daniel's attitude towards his studies and obligations.

1 Read chapter 1 of the book of Daniel to get familiar with the context.

2 Let's identify some of Daniel's attitudes, described in 1:4: "[young men] showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace. He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians". In the light of these attitudes, how would you describe Daniel's attitude toward his studies?

3 During this training, Daniel and his friends had to negotiate and compromise on certain things that a common Jew would have never done. This is how biblical scholar Chris Wright describes it: they said yes to pagan education, a political career, and a change of names.[2] But there is one thing they said no to: the king's food. This is how it is described in 1:8, "But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way".
Sharing his table and his food was seen as a gesture of loyalty to the king and to his imperial project. What else can we conclude about Daniel's attitude towards his studies after he refused these aspects?

4 From where or whom do our intellectual capacities come? In verse 17, it states that God gave to Daniel and his friends "knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning". What else does this fact tell us about Daniel's attitude towards his studies? How consciously and deliberately do you recognize your intellectual abilities as an "endowment" - a gift - from God?

[2] Christopher J. H. Wright, *Tested by Fire: Daniel 1-6* (Milton Keynes, UK: Scripture Union, 1993).

BIBLE STUDY 2: OUR ATTITUDES TOWARDS OUR STUDIES

Questions

- 5 *Now let's focus on one word from this passage: "friends". What part do you think Daniel's community of friends played in his attitude towards his studies?*
-

- 6 *On a blank sheet of paper, collect all your findings about Daniel's attitude towards his studies. If you feel inspired, do this in an artistic way; for example, by using different colored pencils, lettering, collage, or simply a list.*
-

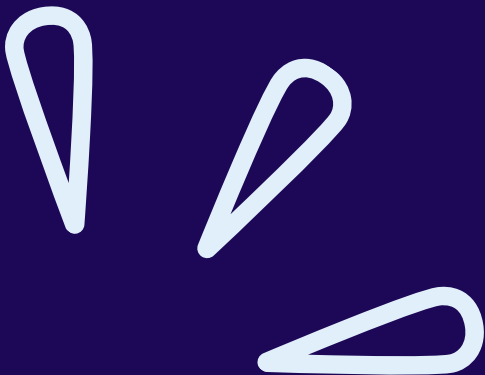
Going further

The circumstances from which you came into university life, or those you are currently experiencing, may not have been or are not the most promising. What is going to help you achieve a healthy, positive attitude despite these circumstances?

Some of the characteristics of Daniel's attitude towards his studies include: openness to learn a bit of everything, reasonableness, service-mindedness, keeping his loyalty to God as a priority, recognizing his intellectual abilities as a gift from God, and fellowship with other classmates/colleagues who were believers. On which of these will you focus in order to grow?



Bible study 3:
Wonder



BIBLE STUDY 3 : WONDER



**Salimou Traoré &
Dieudonné Tindano,**

Both members of Scripture Engagement
GBUAF regional team

Dr Jacob Yarabatioula,

Impact Université coordinator for Burkina Faso



Text: Job 38 & 39

Introduction

Job is one of the biblical characters whose example is much quoted in sermons. He is described by God himself as a man of integrity and uprightness, who turns away from evil. But later, in his time of plenty, Job is tested and stripped of everything. He does not appear to understand or agree fully with what is happening to him, and even seems to be arguing with God. In response to Job's protest, God speaks in chapters 38 and 39 of the eponymous book.

What do you marvel at in these texts?

What do you learn about God's greatness, omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence?

Which attitudes does this inspire in you towards God and in your own research?

BIBLE STUDY 3: WONDER

Questions

1 *These two chapters allow us to observe the interaction between God and Job. How would you classify the method of questioning or stages of progression adopted by the Eternal God? What do these tell us about our world, our planet earth? Which one amazes you the most?*

2 *How in your culture or society does someone express wonder at something or some reality that is beyond him or her?*

3 *In chapter 39, the Lord talks about some animals. What do you discover about these animals and which of them amazes you the most? Explain*

4 *Do you ever marvel at your research? Share your moments of wonder.*

5 *Among the questions that the Lord addressed to Job, name two that most fascinate you. For which would science have reliable answers? Which questions have yet to be answered? What does the depth of these questions inspire in terms of your attitude towards God?*

6 *What feelings do these two chapters arouse in you towards the Lord? What actions are you willing to take in the face of God's greatness and man's objective limitations?*

7 *How can the information revealed by God in these chapters lead us to continue our research instead of abandoning it? How should we worship God in the imperfection that characterizes our works, our research?*

Going further

Read Job 39:34-38 again. As was the case with Job, we can be in a quarrel with God about something in our lives that we don't understand or accept. Like Job, God allows us to respond. But are our arguments sound? If not, what concrete action do these verses challenge you to take in your learning?

What predisposed Job to such an attitude? What can prevent people, including Christian seekers, from adopting the same attitude as Job?

Bible study 4: Our studies and the true light



BIBLE STUDY 4 : OUR STUDIES AND THE TRUE LIGHT



Dr Timothée Joset, historian and missiologist, IFES Engaging the University Coordinator



Text: John 1:1-18

Introduction

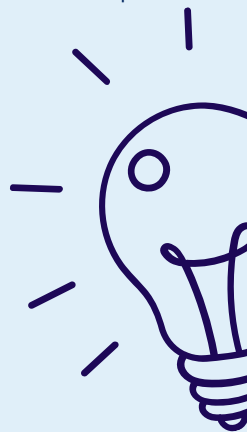
I believe in Christianity as I believe that the Sun has risen, not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.[3]

Have you noticed that at university, especially at the undergraduate level, we do not always take time to reflect on the lights by which we make observations or draw conclusions in our disciplines, or even on the conditions that make their practice possible?

What is considered worthy of learning, transmission, and development is implicit, most of the time. Similarly, if we adopt a particular methodology, we will see what we study in a different light. Consider an ancient manuscript on a library desk or a biological sample under a microscope. Depending on the atmosphere in which these elements are studied, it could be easier or harder to understand their content. As a result, we might well draw different conclusions than we would if, for example, the lighting was different.

What about the Bible? If you read John's prologue, you will quickly see that it echoes the creation account of Genesis 1 and presents, in a very evocative way, the origins of the world and Christ's role in that creation. This text sheds new light on the universe, and perhaps also on the world of our studies. It makes us aware of the origin of the true light and offers us a new light under which to consider our life as well as the other lights that illuminate what we study. Let us therefore reflect on our relationship to knowledge and to Christ in the light of this extraordinary text.

[3] C. S. Lewis, "Is Theology Poetry?" in *They Asked for a Paper* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1962), 164–65.



BIBLE STUDY 4: OUR STUDIES AND THE TRUE LIGHT

Preparation questions

1 Read through the whole text. What resonates with you? Why or why not? What seems very clear to you?

2 Reread this text, imagining that you will receive it in class (take the main subject you are studying or have studied). What could you say about this text with the methodology of your field of study?

3 Do you ever marvel at your research? Share your moments of wonder.

4 Take an inspirational lead from history or physics, both of which talk a lot about causes and effects. The text here talks about beginnings. What are our origins? Both disciplines would have different answers. Studying geography, we might notice a change of place between where Jesus was before and after his time on earth. A medical student might focus on the relationship between “flesh and spirit”. Psychologists would wonder how “grace and truth” can affect people. Communication students and engineers could wonder at the notion of “revelation” and what “dwelling” reveals. Lawyers might point out that there is a change in jurisdiction between the “law of darkness” and the “law of light”.

BIBLE STUDY 4: OUR STUDIES AND THE TRUE LIGHT

Some cultural and linguistic background

The Greek term translated "word" was also used by many philosophers to mean "reason," the force which structured the universe; Philo combined this image with Jewish conceptions of the "word." The Old Testament had personified Wisdom (Prov 8), and ancient Judaism eventually identified personified Wisdom, the Word and the Law (the Torah). By calling Jesus "the Word," John calls him the embodiment of all God's revelation in the Scriptures and thus declares that only those who accept Jesus honor the law fully (1:17). Jewish people considered Wisdom/Word divine yet distinct from God the Father, so it was the closest available term John had to describe Jesus.[4]

Study questions

V.1 *To what extent does the fact that the Word is at the beginning of everything influence your daily life at university? Could it make you reconsider certain priorities (time management, reading, etc.)?*

V.3 *"Through him all things were made": think for a moment about what this means for your discipline, for your university, for you. What does it mean to you that Christ is the basis of all these things?*

V.5 *"darkness has not overcome it": to what extent do you see darkness at work around you at university? What difference could the light of Christ make in your environment?*

V.8 *"He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light." What contrast do you see with the academic world? Can you think of examples of people who "think they are lights" or conversely, others who accept that they are not the centre of the world? What characterizes them?*

[4] Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), Jn. 1.1-18.

BIBLE STUDY 4: OUR STUDIES AND THE TRUE LIGHT

What does it mean to you, at university, in daily life, or in your studies/research, to "bear witness to the Light"? (see also Matthew 5:13-16).

V.14 *What is the relationship to physical matter in your discipline? Is it seen as a limit? How does the fact that Jesus became flesh change your perception of the world?*

Where do you see signs of grace and truth in your university? How could you, in your own way, promote them?

V.16 *"we have all received grace": what is the place of "reception" in your university life? For what reasons might you express gratitude to God for the grace you receive at university?*

Going further

For the next two weeks, make notes on where you see references to the origins of what you are studying or to a theoretical approach in your discipline. Also keep track of where you observe phenomena of 'testimony': i.e., someone talking about what he or she has understood and wanting to convince you of it.



Bible study 5:

Disputed power



BIBLE STUDY 5 : DISPUTED POWER



Sarah Nigri, Historian of political history and participatory democracy, former General Secretary of ABUB, member of the Logos and Cosmos Initiative team



Text: Mark 10:35-45

Introduction

As areas of knowledge, the human and social sciences utilize man and society, in the complexity of their relations, as objects of study. The analysis of humanity's social, political, economic, and technological transformations is hugely relevant because it sheds light on our past and present, and can affect our future.

In academics, suppositions and projects are regularly in dispute. As Christian researchers, we work is aligned with the gospel cause, and is motivated and driven by the faith. Therefore, commitment to the Kingdom of God must shape the science we produce, as well as the positions we embrace in the university, the Church, and society.

The power of knowledge that serves the Kingdom

My first attempt to build bridges between faith and academic knowledge took place at the beginning of my graduate studies. My efforts were a reaction to the questions and provocations of fellow students and teachers about aspects of Church history, including the Crusades, the Inquisitions, and the "Conquest of the New World". How could I open a dialogue with them?

It is undeniable that arbitrariness, violence, exploitation, and even criminal acts have been committed throughout history in the name of God and, regrettably, still occur in the present day. However, positioning myself as being in favor of the Church and the Kingdom – whether I am before fellow students, professors, or society in general – does not mean I am justifying, minimizing, or denying the tragedies and errors committed by Christians.

To build bridges and to place history under the lordship of Christ, it is necessary to recognize and denounce problems, crimes – and in theological language, sins – committed by the Church as an institution at every moment. It is also important to ensure that the past is not forgotten, and that the present is understood critically so that the same mistakes are avoided in the future.

BIBLE STUDY 5: DISPUTED POWER

I have learned, however, that there will always be moments in history when political projects of power merge with religious projects of domination, and that the consequences of this are harmful for society. The Church of Christ will always be confronted and held responsible for the participation of Christians in spurious partnerships. On a personal and collective level, a good way to respond to this is to learn more about the Scriptures, their reality, and our own corresponding feelings.

We are confronting evil and glorifying Christ by investigating and raising the visibility of characters, movements, and initiatives that promote life, justice, peace, and the common good. Thus, knowledge gains a prophetic character, denouncing errors and announcing hope. The human and social sciences, put under the lordship of Jesus, are powerful allies for promoting life and transforming the world.

Questions

Read Mark 10:35-45

1 *The request of James and John reveals the wickedness in the human heart. We are tempted to associate "faith" (in the gospel or in science) with projects of personal and political power. How are ambitions of power and recognition manifested in the (religious and academic) circles of which you find yourself a part?*

2 *The other disciples reacted with indignation to what James and John asked, not because of the ambition revealed, but because they shared the same desire for power, and they felt at a disadvantage. How does this temptation affect you?
Write down a prayer, giving the desires of your heart to God.*

3 *The Lord knows well the logic of power that rules the relationship between "rulers" and ruled, "kings and subjects", "masters and slaves" [literal translation from the Spanish NIV]. How would you describe it (Mark 10:42-45)? How does this logic contrast with that of the Kingdom?*

BIBLE STUDY 5: DISPUTED POWER

4 In Mark 10:35-45, we see that the disciples had not yet understood the high cost of following Christ. The power and influence that they would have on history and the world would be forged with sweat, tears, and blood. How does this apply to us today?

5 Upon hearing the brothers' request, Jesus exclaims, "You don't know what you are asking". Being a disciple does not guarantee that our ignorance will disappear or that our Christian mind will automatically be shaped for us. What does it take to gain a true knowledge and attitude of being a Christian? (For further reflection: Romans 12:1-3; 2 Corinthians 4:5-7 & 5:17-21; Psalm 1:1-2; and Micah 6:8).

Going further

According to Jesus' statement in the passage we studied, where does the true power take place? In those who are powerful or in those who are seen as small? In the one who submits to others or in the one to whom they submit?

"The more powerful power is, the more quietly it will act. The power which needs to display itself has already been weakened. A small counterpower can cause harm that a supreme power will perceive. With that [small counterpower], a small opponent has a great meaning, in other words, a great power [...]". [5]

[5] Byung-Chul Han, *What is Power?* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2018), 11-12, 16.





Bible study 6: Tools and technology



BIBLE STUDY 6 : TOOLS AND TECHNOLOGY



Roland Cubahiro,

Computer engineer with a focus in robotics and AI, member of the Logos and Cosmos Initiative team in Francophone Africa



Text: Genesis 3:1-7, Mark 6:1-3

Introduction

I have been fascinated by computer technology since I first touched the keyboard of a desktop in my local Internet café. The shimmering screens with animated advertisements flanking my electronic mail, were a new sight. At the time, the internet and computing technologies carried an aura of new possibility, a new future. That's probably one of the reasons why I chose computer engineering as my major. It was during this time at university that I was introduced to student ministry and later served for almost six years in different roles.

However, I can't remember a time when my studies or the topics in class were part of the conversations in the student ministry gatherings. We were glad to meet and to worship God. Unfortunately (or consequently), it was rare and difficult to introduce our views as Christians back into our class activities. We were living in two worlds. IFES's Engaging the University helped me merge these two worlds at university.

There was a quote from the E-learning page that resonated with me: "We do not 'take Christ' into the university; it is He who goes ahead of us and leads us there." [6] I learned that the goal was not just to be at university to "preach" the Gospel, but to be part of the redeeming plan of God. As the Apostle Paul said to the Colossians: "... to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood ..." (Colossians 1:21).

Later, I returned to university for a research MA in robotics. When I was asked about the connection between my faith and my studies, it was difficult to answer at first. The challenge of understanding mathematical theories and applying them to specific goals is so consuming that it sometimes feels like an end in itself. Moreover, it is not easy to find the obvious questions and discussions of robotics in the pages of Scriptures.

[6] Vinoth Ramachandra, "Christian Witness in the University" in *Word and World* 4 (2017), accessed 30 March, 2023, <https://ifesworld.org/en/journal/christian-witness-in-the-university/>

BIBLE STUDY 6: TOOLS AND TECHNOLOGY

Today, self-autonomous machines are not yet frequently encountered in our social life, but it is no longer a far-fetched dream. From robot waiters, moon-exploring rovers, care-taker robots to self-driving cars, it is evident that machines will be part of how we interact with the world. Of course, this fact comes with important ethical questions. Depending on who is asking the questions, approaches to these issues differ. Are there boundaries around equipping robots in self-sufficiency? Is it morally right to entrust life-threatening decisions to robots (military, healthcare, etc.)? What about robot's rights if they ever become part of social life? Can robots think? These questions and many others are essential for technology developers' discussions, as well as for the church and global society. I suggest Wes Avram's article "Connecting with a Theology of Technology" for thoughts on the questions that technology presents to us.[7]

If someone tries to answer those questions directly, without putting them in the context of the Bible's big story, it would be like starting a story in the middle. Therefore, we need first to step back and realize that the Scriptures tell us stories about the invention of tools and materials, and how they are used in society.

Questions

- 1 *Reading the first chapter of Genesis we see God as the sole actor in a creation or invention story. Apart from the verb "to create", what other verbs can you find in the text that imply the process of "making"? If Genesis 1 was a manufacturing industry, what processes do you see in the text that would lead to a final product?*
- 2 *(Read Genesis 3:1-7). After eating the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve were able to notice their nakedness and covered themselves with fig leaves. Using the elements in creation to make tools for a purpose is what we understand as invention. However, it is clear in the passage that not every invention is done in line with God's original plan (consider the story of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11:1-9). We read in the chapter about their interaction with God after sinning. (Genesis 3:21). Explain God's reaction to the covers Adam and Eve made?*

[7] Wes Avram, "Connecting with a theology of technology" in *Reflections* (Yale Divinity School, autumn 2011), accessed 30 March, 2023, <https://reflections.yale.edu/article/ibelieve-facing-new-media-explosion/connecting-theology-technology>

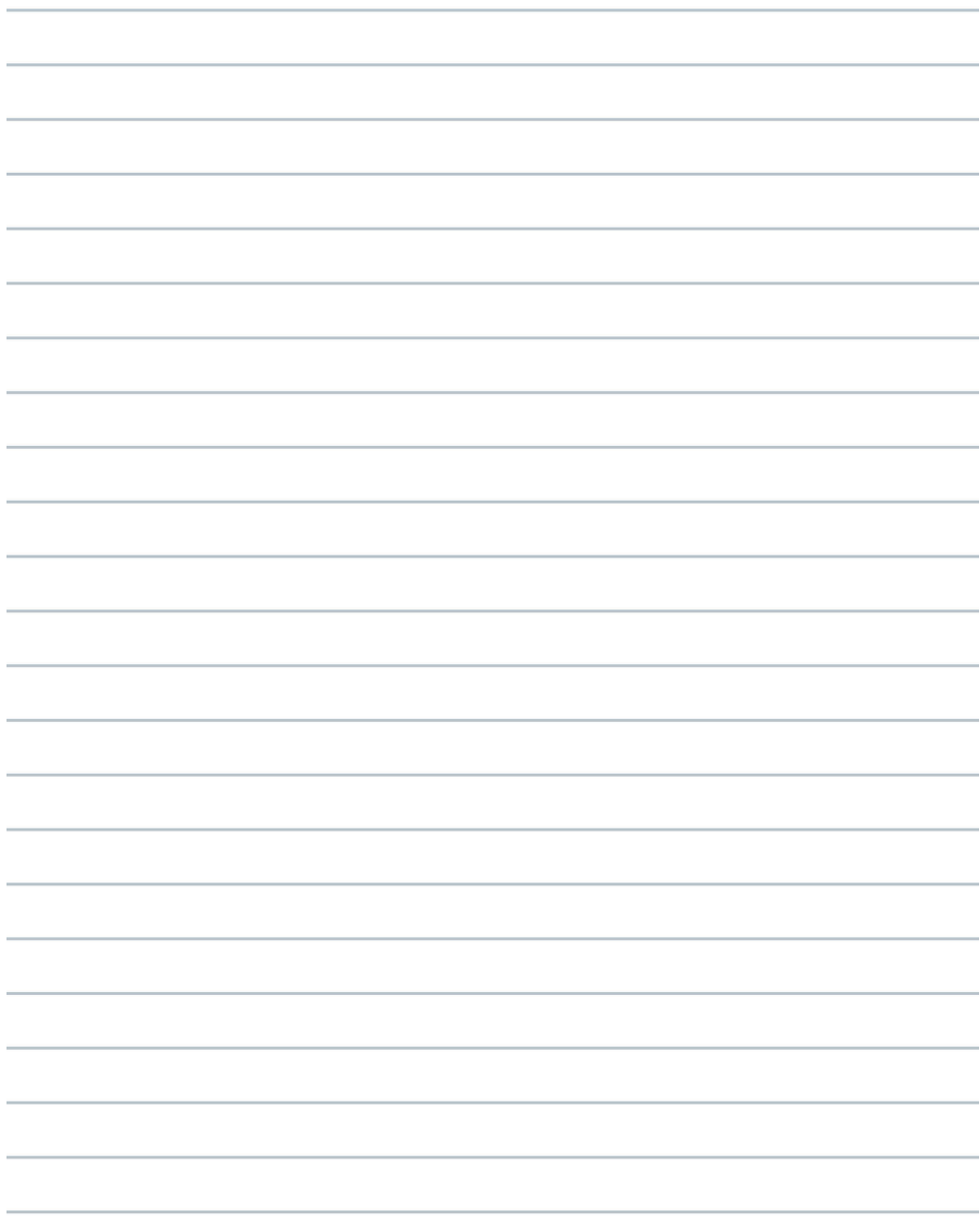
BIBLE STUDY 6: TOOLS AND TECHNOLOGY

3 *(Read Mark 6: 1-3). The evangelists called Jesus a craftsman. Jesus found “favor before God and men” (Luke 2:52) while occupied with the production of tools meant to improve his fellow citizens’ daily lives. Moreover, he probably made a living out of his craft. Is research part of God’s plan to manifest his glory or is it something with no connection to the Bible’s plan of redemption? If it is part of God’s plan, how can you encourage Christian students to embrace it as a field of mission?*

4 *(Read 1 Peter 3:15). Peter encourages his audience to be ready to account for the hope they carry in the world. A distinctive feature of Christianity is the hope of the Good News, not just for the souls but for the entire creation. Robotics and technology are sometimes driven by the hope of building machines equal or even superior to human beings. From a Christian perspective, an achievement like this seems to threaten the sacredness of human beings as taught by the Scriptures. Do you know other stories from Scriptures where created tools were elevated to the status of God? How does the Bible respond to this?*

5 *What controversial topics are part of your field of studies? Is there an insight from the Bible you can suggest as an answer?*





Bible study 7:

Adam the animal scientist



BIBLE STUDY 7 : ADAM THE ANIMAL SCIENTIST



Onesphore Hakizimana, Masters student in animal production at the University of Rwanda, Tier-2 Catalyst in the Logos and Cosmos Initiative



Text: Genesis 1 and 2

Introduction

What's the point of studying at university? Many students see academics in terms of earning marks and a degree, which ultimately lead to a good job. Many lecturers and researchers view academics for its essential income earning function. What is your attitude towards academics? Take some time to think about it before you begin this study. It would also be useful to go back and revisit Study 2.

I like to consider academics in terms of the opportunity it presents to equip us as God's representatives or agents in a particular sphere of life. At my university, with the help of the LCI, I launched a network of Christian students, among those in my discipline of animal science, and we called the network Agents of God in Animal Science. This study lets you into some of the discussions we've had.

What's your view on the reason why animals exist? Consider not only your ideas but also your actions – how you interact with animals and animal products. Have you ever noticed that many people think animals basically live for the sake of people? Through our study of Scripture, my colleagues and I came to the conclusion that this idea is linked to the sinfulness of the human heart, which causes us to think that everything exists for us. It also generates an incorrect perspective in academics.

Consider Genesis 1 and 2, which lay the foundation for everything one could choose to study, whether the natural, applied, social, or human sciences. I'd like to explore how this creation account informs animal sciences.



BIBLE STUDY 7: ADAM THE ANIMAL SCIENTIST

After reading the chapters, go back and look at Genesis 1:25-28.

1 *What is God's attitude to the animals he has created?*

2 *What instructions does God give to Adam in v. 28 and how do you see them as relevant to the work of animal scientists today? How are they relevant to your own life, work, and study?*

3 *How might animal scientists fail to interact with animals in the way God intends, and what are the consequences on the personal level of that failure? What are the consequences on a global level? Share some examples. You might also want to refer to the story of the fall in Genesis 3, particularly v. 15.*

Now look at Genesis 2:19-20, paying attention to the ways that Adam and the animals relate, as well as ways that God and Adam work together.

4 *Taxonomy is one of the first subjects for a student of animal science. It is the science of naming, describing, and classifying animals. Clearly, if God asked Adam to do the work of a taxonomist, Adam had the ability to do it, which is why we can say that Adam was an animal scientist. Notice how God and Adam work in partnership, and how God is interested to see how Adam will do his part. What does the passage imply about God's view of science, God's guidelines for science, and the role of God in science?*

5 *Now think about this passage from today's standpoint, as we stand on the other side of the Fall and after millennia of human history. Do you think we can recapture this kind of relationship with God or with non-human animals? Does this passage give you any guidance in thinking about your studies, or the work you aim to do?*

BIBLE STUDY 7: ADAM THE ANIMAL SCIENTIST

For extra reflection, read Isaiah 11:6. What do you find interesting in the relationship human beings will have with animals in the new creation? How similar or different is it to what is described in Genesis 1 and 2? Take a minute to think about how the human-animal relationship has been affected by the arrival of sin into the world and the redemption provided by Christ; and think about how it will be affected by the new creation that we are awaiting.

Conclusion

Animals exist for God's glory. According to Genesis 1:25, they are his creation, and he was pleased with their existence. Given that animals exist for God's glory, animal scientists' specific task is to help make animals fruitful in quality and quantity, which serves not only to satisfy people's earthly needs, but also to help animals thrive. When students, scientists, and lecturers do not understand this fact, they are blind to the purpose of the academics and work. Their aim of study and work is satisfying their ego. As an animal scientist, I've learned how humanity's failure to manage animals well has harmed them (promoting diseases, for instance) and caused great destruction everywhere on earth. But God is calling more students, scientists, and lecturers to see how they, in their respective fields, can build on what he created and generate the long-lasting results he intended.

At the University of Rwanda, the Agents of God in Animal Science group found that this understanding made us effective in campus evangelism. In fact, our group grew rapidly because many Christians were attracted to our approach, and three people became Christians in our first Bible study, where we discussed how animals exist for God. They were saved after realising that they'd been living as though they were the center of the universe, where everything (including animals) served them. Having repented, they recognized that academic studies are not undertaken for personal gain. Rather, they are a means to understanding who God is and his desires embedded in creation. How amazing it is to do evangelism in a language to which the students could relate! God has sent us to do the work of evangelists in every nation, and science provides a means of communication that transcends the differences between us. Therefore, I believe we are called to make disciples through the language of science.



Bible study 8:
The silent and the silenced



BIBLE STUDY 8 : THE SILENT AND THE SILENCED



Deborah Vieira, Poet with a degree in Portuguese Language and Literature and a masters in Literature and Cultural Studies, a member of ABUB Brazil, and Catalyst in the Logos and Cosmos Initiative

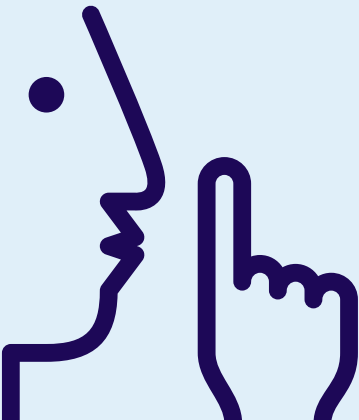


Text: Mark 10: 46-52

Introduction

The theme of oppressed and marginalized characters is very present in cinema, like in the Korean movie **Parasite**. Similarly, in publishing, you find Colleen Hoover's books featuring women in abusive relationships (books that are outselling even the Bible in the USA). You also observe this theme in academia. Whether in literature, the humanities, biology and other sciences, there are many people who justify their research by saying that they want to **give a voice to the underprivileged**. But what does this mean?

Indian philosopher and professor of comparative literature, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, takes up Antonio Gramsci's term "subaltern" to reflect on how researchers have explored this theme in their respective fields. Within their perspectives, we can identify those who are the oppressors (e.g., English colonizers in the Indian context that Spivak highlights) and the oppressed (e.g., the Indians who stood up to the colonizers and claimed their place). But there are other people who are not recognized, people who are not heard even by those we call the oppressed, who are fighting injustices. This group is called "subalterns". Deprived of their rights, excluded from the market and without direct political representation, they cannot speak because they don't have access to the conversations that shape society. Whatever they think or feel has no effect, no consequence, no audience. Thus, Spivak asks: **can the subaltern speak?** She believes they cannot. But, crucially, the path of change must find ways to fight against subalternity, instead of only finding ways to speak for the subaltern.



BIBLE STUDY 8: THE SILENT AND THE SILENCED

Read Mark 10: 46-52 and consider the following questions

- 1 *Although it is a bit anachronistic, we can think of these categories in relation to Jesus' context: the oppressors are the Roman invaders; those oppressed by their colonial power are the Jews and regional inhabitants; finally, there was Timaeus' blind son, who was invisibilized and silenced, even among his compatriots. Which people in your context are silenced and only given a voice when someone speaks for them in political, artistic, or academic spaces? Have you been particularly moved by any of their needs?*

- 2 *What is the difference between the crowd's treatment of Timaeus' son and Jesus' treatment of him?*

- 3 *We assume that Jesus knows everyone's hearts deeply because He is God, knowing their greatest longings and desires. Still, He does not heal the blind man immediately; rather, Jesus asks "What do you want me to do for you?" What does this question teach us about Jesus?*

- 4 *If we follow the example of this attitude of Jesus, what attitudes, behaviours, and postures of ours will be challenged?*

- 5 *The crowd treats the blind man differently before and after Jesus tells them to call the blind man. Why do you think this happened?*

- 6 *Spivak's criticism is aimed at those who, in trying to give a voice to the oppressed and underprivileged, only apply their own will and speak what they themselves think those people should want. Do you realize that we can also act like this towards our friends and colleagues when we want to share the Good News? What have you assumed about them, their wants and desires? What questions can you ask them?*

Going further

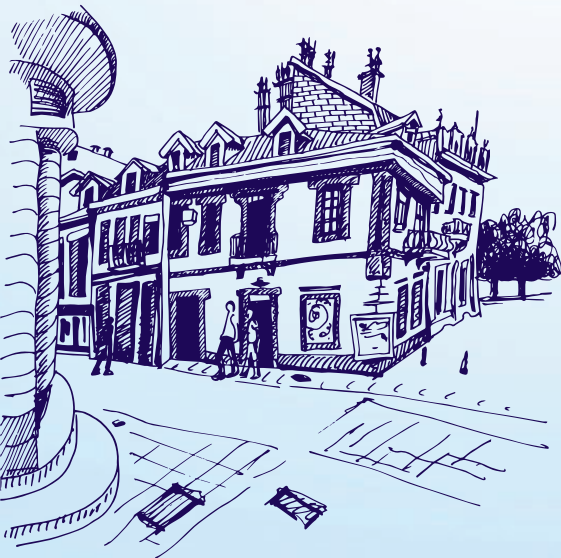
Questions drive the narratives about Jesus: both the ones they ask him, and the ones he asks them. Consider the passage immediately preceding this one, Mark 10:35-45, where James and John ask what might be considered a bad question. (Also see Study #3 in this collection.) Jesus welcomes the questions, engages with them, and is not afraid of what people might think of Him and His questions – even those that seem too obvious. He is always open to receiving our doubts, our questions, and our prayer requests, even if he doesn't answer them all (or at least not as we expect). Getting to know Jesus and growing in intimacy with Him helps us readjust our perspective so that we can make better, more just requests – for ourselves and others.

How are questions and doubts dealt with in your context? Are there spaces in your school, university, or academic work where these are welcome – or perhaps unwelcome? How does this happen?

What questions can you ask people in your school or university context to serve their needs and create bridges between them and the Good News of Jesus?

EPILOGUE

How to think biblically on contemporary issues.



EPILOGUE – HOW TO THINK BIBLICALLY ON CONTEMPORARY ISSUES

[Material revised and adapted from the “Foundations of Scripture Engagement” eLearning course offered by the IFES Scripture Engagement global team]

INTRODUCTION

Do you believe the Bible speaks to every issue of our life in the world? When you hear the concerns and the conversations going on among students in your context, do you think the Scriptures have something to say?

Sometimes we don't think the Bible could be relevant to issues like global warming or pandemics, because these things are happening millennia after the books of the Scripture were written. We reason that the Bible couldn't possibly comment on issues being discussed in a time and context so different from the point at which it was written.

And sometimes we seem to believe or act as though topics like poverty, politics, or ethics in scientific research are not as important as the “spiritual” issues about which we, as believers in Jesus, should actually care. It is as if the message of the Bible only has importance for what is going to happen to us after we die.

In this collaborative work, we want to reflect on whether we are making erroneous assumptions and explore how we can biblically address contemporary issues.

PAUSE FOR REFLECTION – WHAT CHALLENGES YOU?

We invite you to reflect on one issue, theme, or challenge from our contemporary world that makes you pause and ask: “How do the Scriptures address this?”

When considering your choice, please take the time to think and make notes on why it would be helpful to have a biblical view on it. If you have already tried to understand it through Scripture studies, think about the difficulties or good discoveries you had in the process.

EXPLORING THE RICHNESS OF THE SCRIPTURES

Sometimes, either because of the particular Christian tradition we were raised in or the stereotypes we had before becoming Christians, we might unconsciously think that the Bible is only a religious book for religious people talking about “spiritual” things.

Then, when we start to read and explore the full richness of the Scriptures, we will realize that:

- First, **it speaks to the whole of life**. We are invited to know God’s mind and heart as it relates to every area of existence in the world through a careful examination of the Scriptures. In doing so, we encounter the God who is the Creator, Redeemer, and Lord of everything, whose Word addresses all of life. And this, of course, includes the time we spend at university, whatever we do there and whomever we meet.
- Second, **we need to approach the Bible with humility**. We need to avoid the kind of pride we find in Nebuchadnezzar, who said, “Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?” (Daniel 4:30). Instead, we choose the humble approach of Daniel, who recognizes that “wisdom and power” belong to God, the one who gives knowledge to the wise and the discerning (Daniel 2:20-23).
- Thirdly, **we should acknowledge that God’s Word is given to us with a transformative purpose**. The Bible may well challenge even the types of questions we harbour when beginning to examine and reflect on God’s Word. The answers we find in the Scriptures may not be the ones we expect. Often, what we discover about God’s heart and mind will challenge and transform us, both personally and collectively. It may lead us to be agents of transformation as well.

EPILOGUE

DIGGING DEEPER INTO THE RICHNESS

These three realisations about Scripture have clear implications. God's Word addresses all of life.

So...

...we have an amazing invitation to explore carefully the whole of Scripture so that we may know God's purposes for everything.

We approach God's Word with humility.

So...

...we avoid imagining a scenario in which we find simple answers to complex issues. Difficult questions usually don't have easy answers! It is important to understand clearly both the issues at stake and the patience to read the Scriptures carefully. As we seek God in his Word, together in community and guided by his Spirit, we need to keep the big picture of Scripture in view.

God's Word has a transforming power.

Therefore...

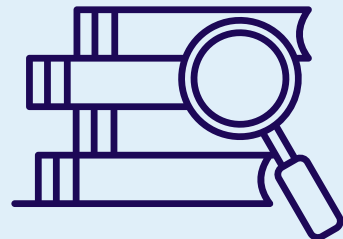
...it is good to remember that God's Word is bigger than our agendas. It may surprise and change even the questions we raise. His Word certainly impacts our lives and every issue of human life in the world, changing and transforming us and our realities according to God's purposes.

PAUSE FOR REFLECTION - WHAT APPROACH WOULD YOU CHOOSE?

How would you try to find the biblical view on any relevant issue in our world today? What steps would you take? What do you think is needed for staying faithful to the Scriptures and relevant to our contemporary world?

ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES BIBLICALLY

It is all right to have doubts on how to address challenges not found by name in the Scriptures, either because they did not exist in 'Biblical' times, or because God's Word only refers to them indirectly. If there are no direct answers in the Scriptures for a particular issue, how could you find what the Bible says about it?



EPILOGUE

There are a variety of ways to discover how the Scriptures address aspects of our modern world. In the following paragraphs, we outline six steps to take as you approach this task. These involve defining and refining the questions, so we really understand what we are asking. After this, we come humbly to the texts in order to seek a biblical understanding and faithful application of the Scriptures to these questions. As we share our experiences with others in a global, diverse community, we hope to grow in ways that are helpful for addressing today's challenges with a biblical context. We should never consider ourselves alone when striving to meet modern challenges while remaining faithful to the Bible. Christians have been confronting and confronted by such challenges for millennia. This is the beauty of the Church.

FIRST STEP: CONSIDER/LISTEN

Consider one possible issue affecting your life today, something which is currently generating a lot of concern and discussion in your context. In fact, an important step towards sharing the good news of Christ with non-Christian friends is to acknowledge their questions, concerns, and interests. It may be a surprise for them to realize that Christians care about the same issues as they do, and that the Christian faith, so too its foundational texts, have deeply relevant things to say on many pertinent issues. The subject of climate change is one example.

SECOND STEP: REFLECT

Reflect on why the issue you chose is important to consider. What is involved? It is good to go beyond your own opinion and perspective. Continue this dialogue with others but do so without relying on what you might already know or assume. Ask people why they are worried about this issue. Our understanding can be enriched and challenged when we listen to other views, paying attention to those who think differently and bring a different perspective rooted in experience or expertise.

Do you know the historical, geographical, social, economic, cultural, and religious details of the issue on which you are reflecting? Gathering relevant information from reliable sources is crucial at this stage and even what is expected from students. Another thing to consider is whether Christian scholars have written on or addressed this topic. If so, could their work be relevant to your context or inspiring to your thought process?

THIRD STEP: LOOK FOR CONNECTIONS, VALUES, AND CAUSES

Information and data can be overwhelming, and even unhelpful, if we fail to make meaningful connections between all the pieces of that accumulated knowledge. Often, the discussions we have with others can really help bring insight to this process.

EPILOGUE

Making these connections is also facilitated by focusing attention on different levels, including:

- *The personal level (How am I affected by it?)*
- *The community level (How is my community affected by this issue?)*
- *The contextual level (How are other people from different contexts than mine being affected?)*
- *The “macro levels” (How are my nation and other nations treating this issue?)*

Consider why this issue is perceived to be important and what values are at stake when it is put under a microscope.

Does the issue affect everyone equally? What about the most vulnerable?

How do attitudes to power, wealth, or social status affect how people view the problem?

Do all solutions to the problem value life equally?

As you seek answers and understanding, think about the possible causes underlying the observable information. We may not agree on the causes, and it can be very helpful to examine the reasons for these diverging perspectives. Not everyone would agree on the causes behind poverty, criminality, racism, or, to use our previous example, climate change. But listening to different views on what causes these problems will help us understand why people do not always unite behind a common solution.

FOURTH STEP: AS A CHRISTIAN, WHY DOES THIS ISSUE CONCERN YOU?

The next step may sound less theoretical and closer to your heart. Why do you consider climate change (or any other issue) a challenge or an issue worth examining? This step begins with you summarizing the kind of questions you are taking to the Scriptures regarding this challenge. It may be helpful to make a list.

Remember, they can reflect and result from the steps you’ve already taken: the conversations with others (first step), your reflections on the subject (second step), and the connections, values, and causes you’ve identified (third step).

Of course, your previous knowledge of the Word of God will determine why this issue concerns you as a Christian (fourth step).

At this point, you may realize that the questions are not simple or straightforward, neither might their connections to the original issue be clear and obvious. But perhaps it is good to recognize that the Bible does not always produce easy answers where the complexities of life are concerned.

EPILOGUE

PAUSE FOR REFLECTION – CONSIDERING CLIMATE CHANGE

Before we continue to the fifth step, open your personal notebook and reflect for a moment on the example we mentioned at the beginning: climate change.

As you consider this topic, it may be helpful to take a few notes for each one of the four steps presented so far.

1. Consider / Listen

Is the issue of climate change being raised by non-Christian friends in your context? How are they doing it? What do scholars in your university say about it?

2. Reflect

Why are people worried about climate change? How would you define or summarize it? What is the relevant information you can gather about it?

3. Connections, values and causes

How is climate change affecting you personally and your community? How is it affecting others? How is it affecting nations and the world? Is it important? Why? What values are at stake? What are the possible underlying causes of climate change? Is there anything we could do about it?

4. Is it important for you as a Christian ?

From what you know of God through the Scriptures and his redeeming work through Christ, why is it relevant to tackle this issue? Do you know how other Christians have related the issue to the Scriptures?

After this pause, we hope you are excited and looking forward to arriving at the final step!



EPILOGUE

FIFTH STEP: EXAMINING THE SCRIPTURES

After carefully considering the questions and challenges raised by one issue, it will be easier to approach the Scriptures for guidance.

When looking at the texts, our first impulse might be to search for any biblical passages that can help us with the problem. While this instinct is fine, we must avoid isolating verses or passages that are agreeable and taking them out of context only to suit our needs.

Explore whether any of the Scriptures' main themes— creation, rebellion, redemption, restoration for example - relate to the issue being raised.

During your research, don't neglect the bigger picture that is the whole narrative of the Scriptures because this story provides an important framework.

For example, climate change is not addressed directly in Scripture, but we do observe themes that correspond directly to that issue, including care for the earth, loving one's neighbours, justice, and exploitation.

PUTTING STEP FIVE INTO PRACTICE

One practical strategy for leading a group discussion is to identify:

- ***Bible passages (or any length, even a whole book) related to this issue.***
- ***A theme that is commonly found in the Scriptures and is also related to it.***

Having identified these passages or themes, reflect on why you've chosen them. How does this help us to biblically understand and address this issue?

Alternatively, select a passage to study in more depth, really engaging with God's Word. Then respond to the issue according to what you found in the Scriptures.

We will often find that God's Word surprises us, raising other questions we have not thought about before, or providing answers we had not expected.

After all, engaging with Scripture is not simply a quest to find answers to all problems in life. It is a journey where we meet God, get to know the Creator of all things, as well as his purposes for us and his creation.

A sixth step

One final step is to explore with other Christians how you would encourage non-Christian friends to examine the Scriptures as they relate to a particular issue in our world.

Think of practical and creative ways to help people grow in their understanding of the Bible's approaches to this issue.

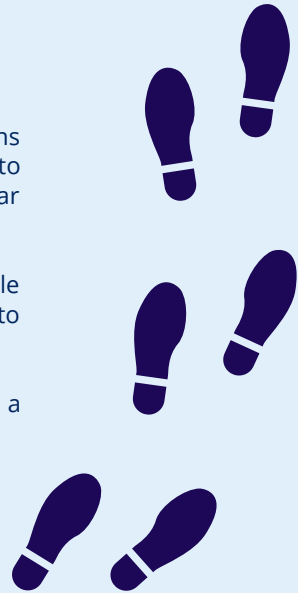
After all, the good news of the life we find in Christ is a powerful transforming message that is for everyone.

CONCLUSION

As we conclude, remember that:

- *God cares about his world and is actively involved in it. Pray to the God of all wisdom to guide you, and our nations, as we grapple with the questions of our day.*
- *The Scriptures have a lot to say about the complex issues of our time and contexts.*
- *Making the bridge between these contemporary issues and the Scriptures is not a simple, straightforward effort, as if it were possible to find 'easy' answers to each question.*
- *Often the 'answers' to our questions come from a wider, honest, and sensible reading of the whole of Scripture, allowing it to challenge the way we see our problems, and letting the Bible speak to our contexts in a fresh and unexpected way.*

As we search for wisdom and understanding in relation to contemporary issues, we must realise that learning continues throughout our lives. Some questions may not be fully resolved, but in the process, we can learn to trust God more, even as we lay our questions, doubts, and struggles before him.



FURTHER READINGS



FURTHER READINGS

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