

Finding God in the Bible:

Read, Examine, Apply



When a Lord Howe Island woodhen is foraging for food, she first chooses a place to search. Then she looks intently at the ground, investigating anything that could be interesting – perhaps poking it with her long beak. If nothing engages her, she scratches with her feet, digging under the leaf litter in the hope that she may locate an edible insect – or two! When she spots a tasty morsel, she immediately grasps it in her beak and swallows it. What the woodhen finds, nourishes her body and becomes part of her life.

Finding God in the Bible has some similarity with the woodhen's daily activity. Having decided which passage in the Bible we wish to explore, we read it carefully, perhaps several times. (A modern translation of the Bible is helpful.) *All* the words, including those that tell us the time of day or where an event is taking place, are noted. As we read, something may attract our attention and

we examine it more closely, dig around and underneath it. We look at what came before and what comes after. Is there a hidden meaning behind the words that spoke to the people who first read it? What do these words mean for us in *our* everyday life? How might God in this passage nourish us or challenge us? Are we led to undertake some action?

We can reflect by ourselves or with others. Every person is different, therefore men and women who read the same words in the Bible will often understand and apply them differently. Such variety enriches a communal Bible study.

If you are not familiar with the Bible, you need to know that it is a collection of many small books. It is usually in two parts. The first part is called the Old Testament and consists of 39 books. It is sometimes referred to as the Hebrew Scriptures. The second part is the New Testament and has 27 books. These books tell us about the life of Jesus and the early church.

The New Testament begins with four gospels, *Matthew, Mark, Luke and John*. They give us four versions of Jesus' life. Following the gospels, is *The Acts of the Apostles* describing the development of the early church after Jesus had died and been raised to life by God. Then come various letters written by Paul and other early Christians. The last book in the Bible is *Revelation* or *Apocalypse*, which contains stories of strange visions of possible future events using symbols involving numbers, mysterious figures and animals. *Revelation* affirms the Lordship of Jesus and the final triumph of God over evil at the end of the world.

You may choose to engage with God in the Bible by examining a Sunday reading at Holy Communion, or a certain verse or story that appeals to you. Below are two brief examples that can guide you in approaching Bible passages.

Reading 1 – Mark 5:21-43

This is a long passage which includes two interwoven healing stories, one of a mature woman and the other of a young girl. Jesus had been in a Gentile country, but has now returned to Galilee. A crowd has gathered around him. Jairus, a leader of the synagogue meets Jesus and pleads for him to come to his home and heal his daughter. Jesus begins to go with Jairus. The crowd follows.

In the crowd is a woman, also desperate for healing, but her illness causes her to be declared 'unclean', and excludes her from society. She should not be

mixing with all these people. Jesus is interrupted by this woman touching him. During Jesus' conversation with the woman we are told that Jairus' daughter has died.

Jairus and the woman, both believe that Jesus can heal by touch. When we touch another, we are also touched by them. There are healing touches and destructive touches.

What speaks to you in these stories? Is it how you touch or are touched by others? Is it a desire for healing and new life – even in the face of death? Perhaps it is Jesus' response to being interrupted by a rejected but desperate and daring woman? Have you the faith of this woman, or Jairus?

Reading 2 – John 13:31-35

These verses are a small part of John's account of the Last Supper in the Upper Room in Jerusalem.

We are told in the preceding verses that Judas has gone to betray Jesus. It is night - dark physically and metaphorically. The train of events leading to and including Jesus' death have been set in motion. Yet Jesus talks about glory, being glorified, going away, and a new commandment, to love one another as he loves us. What is going on? What holds your attention? What does it mean for the Son of Man, Jesus, facing great suffering and death, to be glorified, and God glorified in him?

Jesus at his birth, in his life of healing and teaching, and in his death, revealed God's love to us. Out of love for us, God sent Jesus into our world to live as one of us, to suffer, die and be raised to new life. God's and Jesus' love are one.

The way Jesus loved people and loves us is how God loves us, unconditionally, no matter who we are or what we have done. This is the love that we as followers of Jesus are challenged to show to one another.

What does it mean to be loved by God – to receive such love? Can you glorify God by loving and forgiving other who have hurt you or someone you love?

Like the woodhen, when we find and engage with God in our reading of the Bible, we are nourished. God's Spirit becomes part of our life, directing us how to respond to and show God's love in our relationships with others.

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