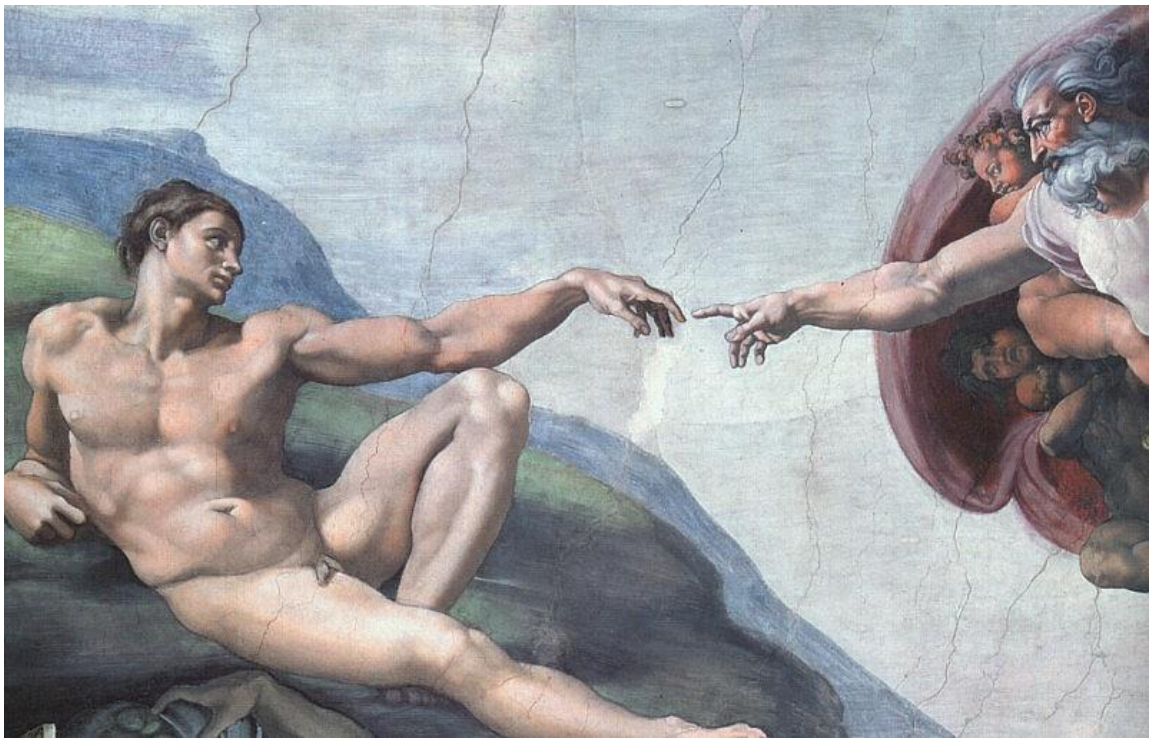


Pathways

Session 3

Gods' story with his people



Resources for participants



Reflection stimulus

Who is this God at the heart of Christianity?

So what god or gods do Christians worship? In one sense it is the god without a name, a god who responds, when asked for a name, 'I am there whoever I am there', who frustrates every effort to be named. In another sense it is a god with three names: Creator, Redeemer, Spirit – that lives-in-us. In another sense it is the god with only one name, Love – Love that embraces the world in a way that takes the shape of a cross, a love that, in turn, transforms everything and can be shared by each of us by embracing our world and those in it.

That's the story at the heart of the Lutheran telling of the Christian vision, which is itself a telling of an old Hebrew story of a loving God. That's the story about which we ask 'How does this story inform knowing, learning, teaching and human becoming in the contemporary world? What kind of college or university should be built and maintained by those who tell such a story? What kind of work is there for us to do in such a place?'

So he decided long ago to adopt us as his children. He did it because of what Jesus Christ has done. It pleased God to do it. All those things bring praise to his glorious grace. God freely gave us his grace because of the One he loves. We have been set free because of what Christ has done. Through his blood our sins have been forgiven. We have been set free because God's grace is so rich. He poured his grace on us by giving us great wisdom and understanding.

Ephesians 1:5-8 (NIRV)

Dear friends, let us love one another, because love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born again because of what God has done. That person knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. How did God show his love for us? He sent his one and only Son into the world. He sent him so we could receive life through him. What is love? It is not that we loved God. It is that he loved us and sent his Son to give his life to pay for our sins. Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we should also love one another. No one has ever seen God. But if we love one another, God lives in us. His love is made complete in us. We know that we belong to him and he belongs to us. He has given us his Holy Spirit. The Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. We have seen it. We give witness to it. God lives in anyone who agrees that Jesus is the Son of God. That kind of person remains joined to God. So we know that God loves us. We depend on it. God is love. Anyone who leads a life of love shows that he is joined to God. And God is joined to him. So love is made complete among us. We will be bold on the day God judges us. That's because in this world we love as Jesus did. There is no fear in love. Instead, perfect love drives fear away. Fear has to do with being punished. The one who fears does not have perfect love. We love because he loved us first. Anyone who says he loves God but in fact hates his brother or sister is a liar. He doesn't love his brother or sister, whom he has seen. So he can't love God, whom he has not seen. Here is the command God has given us. Anyone who loves God must also love his brothers and sisters.

Israel, listen to me. The Lord is our God. The Lord is the one and only God. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. Love him with all your strength. The commandments I give you today must be in your hearts. Make sure your children learn them. Talk about them when you are at home. Talk about them when you walk along the road. Speak about them when you go to bed. And speak about them when you get up. Write them down and tie them on your hands as a reminder. Also tie them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses. Also write them on your gates.

Deuteronomy 10:1-9 (NIRV)

Jesus did many other miraculous signs in front of his disciples. They are not written down in this book. But these are written down so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. If you believe this, you will have life because you belong to him.

John 20:30,31 (NIRV)

Questions for reflection

- **What is your understanding of the message of God's story?**
- **How could God's story inform knowing, learning, teaching and human becoming in the contemporary world?**
- **What kind of college or school should be built and maintained by those who tell such a story?**

National Church Life Survey

How often do you read the Bible on your own? How important is private Bible reading to a person's growth in faith?

In the 2001 National Church Life Survey a representative sample of church attenders were asked by how often they read the Bible on their own. This question focussed on the private devotional reading of scripture, not the public reading of the Bible or group Bible studies.

Around a third (31%) of all attenders can be described as 'frequent Bible readers', reading it privately more than once a week, with a further 5% reading it once per week. Around 27% read the Bible occasionally, 20% hardly ever and 17% not at all.

NOT JUST A PRIVATE AFFAIR

There are a number of clues that suggest that the private practise of Bible reading tends to go hand in hand with corporate public expressions of faith.

For example, when people report that their growth in faith is due to involvement in groups or congregations, then they also tend to be more likely than average to read the Bible frequently (around 50% to 60% of this group are frequent Bible readers).

This contrasts with people who say that their faith has grown through their own private activity, where only a third (32%) say they read the Bible frequently.

This link between a shared experience of faith and the private devotional life is seen in a number of other ways. If you selected ten random church attenders, three of them would read their Bible privately and regularly. However, among frequent church attenders, there are twice as many frequent Bible readers (61%). People involved in small prayer, discussion, or Bible study groups are also twice as likely than average to be frequent Bible readers (67%). There are also higher than average proportions of frequent Bible readers among people who look for opportunities to talk about their faith with others (63%) or are involved in evangelistic outreach (73%), as well as those involved with community service or social justice issues (50%).

It appears that attenders who are frequent Bible readers have a much greater likelihood to have an outward focus in the practice of their faith and to be part of gathered communities of faith, such as small groups or congregations.

When private Bible reading accompanies being part of a wider Christian community, attenders will more often be growing in faith, then if they are alone.

[This article is based on a report on levels of Bible reading among Australian church attenders commissioned by the Bible Society]

Theological focus

In the Bible God reveals himself to us so that we can honour, love and trust him as our God. The Bible contains the story of God working with his people and through his people and it makes known God's marvelous plan for saving the fallen world (the 'history of salvation') which reached its climax in the coming to earth of Jesus Christ, to live, die and rise again as the savior of the world.

The biblical narrative reveals God as the creator who continues his creative activity in the world. It reveals Jesus Christ as the way of salvation and the Holy Spirit as the one who brings us to faith and who in this way creates and preserves the Christian community. The Bible links together the way in which God revealed himself to his people in the Old Testament, at the time of Christ, and still reveals himself today.

So that we and all people of all time can know what God has revealed and the word he has spoken through the prophets and apostles and particularly through Jesus Christ, the Word who came in human flesh, God has given us his written word in the books of the Old and New Testaments. The Bible is a library of books in various forms, written in human words by human beings. Although God used the personality and style of the human writers, their language, literary methods, knowledge of nature and history, experience of God, etc, the Bible is also a divine book because the various writings were inspired by the Holy Spirit and therefore God is the author (2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:21). Just as Jesus Christ is both fully human and fully divine, so too the Bible is human and divine in all its parts. This cannot be explained rationally but is accepted in faith.

The centre of the Bible is its witness to Jesus Christ (*'christocentric'*). Jesus challenged his hearers to recognise that the Scriptures testify to him (John 5:39; Luke 24:25-27). This means that the Bible must be interpreted in the light of Christ and the gospel. The clear message of God's love and grace and forgiveness must come through for the reader.

Here [in the Old Testament] you will find the swaddling cloths and the manger in which Christ lies, and to which the angel points the shepherds [Luke 2:12]. Simple and lowly are these swaddling cloths, but dear is the treasure, Christ, who lies in them – Martin Luther (Luther's Works 35:236)

The Bible as God's story

The Bible can be called God's story, the story of God's relationship with people. The story begins with God's creation of the universe and people and how God lives in relationship with his people. The Old Testament goes on to reveal the story of God's relationship with his people, the Israelites. God's relationship with people is revealed as God calls the Israelites into relationship and provides them with rules for living with God and each other. The stories also reveal the nature of people as they desire for relationship with God, break this relationship and fall away from God and then in times of need return to their relationship with God. Throughout these stories God's faithfulness, love for and forgiveness of his people remains.

The New Testament contains the story of God present in the world with people, in Jesus. In Jesus, God reveals the plan for completely restoring the relationship between God and people. The New Testament contains the stories about Jesus and letters for Jesus' followers who live out their relationship with God in lives of love and service.

GOD'S STORY													
Begin		Patriarchs		Exodus	Kingdoms		Exile	Return	Climax		Church		End
→		→		→	→		→	→	†		←		←
C R E A T I O N	A B R A H A M	J A C O B	J O S E P H	M O S E S	D A V I D	I S A I A H	J E R E M I A H	D A N I E L	N E H E M I A H	J E S U S	A C T S	L E T T E R S	C O M E

Imagery used in the Bible

Your word is a lamp to guide me and a light for my path.

Psalms 119:105 (GNB)

For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

Hebrews 4:12 (NIV)

But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.

Matthew 13:23 (NIV)