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– Gerard Kelly, The Bless Network

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She lives a quiet life on England's Sussex coast.

By the same author

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100

STAND-ALONE BIBLE STUDIES

To grow healthy home groups

Penelope Wilcock

MONARCH
BOOKS

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Contents

About this book	9
“Tell me about it!”	
– Bible characters in moments we can identify with (25 studies)	23
Adam	24
Eve	26
Abraham	28
Ruth	30
Cain	32
Elijah	34
Esther	36
The widow of Zarephath	38
David	40
Jeremiah	42
Peter	44
Dorcas	46
Paul	48
Martha	50
Judas	52
Barnabas	54
Mary the mother of Jesus	56
John the Baptist	58
Andrew	60
The boy with five loaves and two fishes	62
Pontius Pilate	64
Zacchaeus	66
Deborah	68
Joseph	70
Jacob	72

**Themes from the four Gospels – key features from the four Gospels
(20 studies) 75**

Matthew

The faithful Israel and the new Moses	76
The teacher of righteousness	78
The holy mountain	80
The fulfilment of the Law	82
The Zoroastrians	84

Mark

The Son of God	86
The reinterpretation of leadership	88
Transfiguration – sight and insight	90
The unvarnished Jesus	92
The unnamed outsider	94

Luke

Finding the lost	96
Healing the sick	98
The Holy Spirit	100
A gospel for the whole world	102
Lifting up the lowly	104

John

The light of the world	106
The living Word	108
The body of Christ	110
The <i>ego eimi</i>	112
The way of love	114

Walking in the light (15 studies) 117

Justice	118
Mercy	120

Bearing witness	122
Humility	124
Honesty and transparency	126
Kindness	128
Accountability	130
Simplicity	132
Discipline	134
Chastity	136
Joy	138
Compassion	140
Courage	142
Fidelity	144
Stewardship	146
Tracing the circle of the church's year (15 studies)	149
Three Advent studies (there are four weeks in Advent – three studies leave space for a Christmas party)	150
Five Lent studies (there are six weeks in Lent – five studies leave space for an Easter party)	156
A study for Ascension	166
A study for Pentecost	168
A study for the Holy Trinity	170
Two studies for Ordinary Time	172
A study for Harvest Thanksgiving	176
A study for All Saints	178
Learning from the life of Jesus (20 studies)	181
His birth at Bethlehem	182
His home at Nazareth	184
His fasting in the wilderness	186
His healing work	188
His teaching work	190
His prophetic spirit	192
His servant spirit	194

His attitude to authority	196
His attitude to women	198
His emphasis on forgiveness	200
His emphasis on personal faith and choice	202
His emphasis on thanksgiving	204
His proclamation of the kingdom	206
His teaching about freedom	208
His relationship with creation	210
His path of simplicity	212
His faithfulness in prayer	214
His passion and death	216
His work of reconciliation	218
His resurrection and glorious ascension	220
Insights from the Law and the Prophets (5 studies)	223
Putting God first	224
The poor and needy	226
Choosing life	228
Keeping faith with a faithful God	230
To do justice, to love mercy and to walk humbly with thy God	232

About this book



Why do we have house groups?

House groups offer a chance for existing relationships to deepen and new friendships to form. In a small group, new perspectives enrich our thinking, and we are encouraged to find ourselves not alone in our struggles and human weakness. In the small group we see the power of prayer most wonderfully, as we share our needs and concerns and then watch in amazement as the group gets praying and (time after time) things change, exceeding our timid hopes and building our faith.

The small group is the easiest place for newcomers in church to “taste and see”, and the best context for shy and anxious people to sense that they are loved and accepted, so they can begin to gain in confidence. The small group is the seedbed for vocation and ministry, and the best place for our first tentative exploration of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

In the small group, as people open up and begin to trust one another, deeper problems behind veneers of cheerfulness and self-sufficiency are slowly revealed. A young mother at the end of her tether after two years of sleepless nights; a woman who had an abortion a decade ago and has never been able to forgive herself; a man who is struggling desperately with increased responsibilities after staff cutbacks at his workplace in the recession; someone facing a diagnostic procedure at the hospital and dreading the outcome; someone who fears a loved daughter may be bulimic; someone facing the choice between redundancy or relocation – it is in the small group that these ordinary but profound life experiences will be uncovered and prayed through, so that individual believers are strengthened and sustained to continue living with courage and grace.

All of this is why almost every church runs small groups. They nurture, sustain, and strengthen faith.

Identity and spirituality have their roots in the same earth. The Genesis stories paint pictures of God creating not “humanity” but Adam and Eve. Right there at the start of things, at the place of our making, personhood and individuality are intrinsically involved in our existential nature and our relationship with God.

Human beings are social creatures too, and flourish in community. Oftentimes commandments or expectations are laid upon the community rather than the individual – and when we understand this, it is such a relief. It is interesting from time to time to read the New Testament in the King James Version of the Bible, because it makes the distinction between “thou” (“you” in the singular) and “you” (plural). Many of the charisms of the church – hospitality, healing, mercy, prophetic lifestyle – are meant to be job-shared, not to burn us out. We begin to see that no one of us is expected to be able to do it all, or to do any of it all the time.

The meeting of the whole church for prayer and praise, for ministry and preaching and witness and celebration and Eucharist, usually on a Sunday morning,

is the focus of the church's common life. But by itself it is not enough to train and nourish and encourage the individual disciple in the faith. For that we need the small group – still a community, but where the individual can be personally known.

Resourcing the small group

The great virtue of the small group is not so much the input as the chance to explore, experiment, and share, to move on from being acquaintances or strangers to becoming fast friends and family in Christ.

So the two most vital resources for the small group are time and sensitive leadership. Without these, it cannot fulfil its vital role in the church community.

It is important for every member of the group to be welcomed, and to have a chance to be really heard. Discussion in the small group often takes us into areas of personal challenge and sensitivity, and if a painful story begins to pour out it may bring tears as very deep emotional matter emerges from its compressed and hidden state. To hurry this compounds pain and hints that the schedule takes precedence over the people, that everything has to be stuffed back down inside because it's time for the Bible study to begin. If you want your small-group members to grow and flourish, you have to make space for their stories, and for their unexpected crises when everything goes into overwhelm.

On many occasions I have searched for resource materials for small groups in my care. Though I have found excellent group studies with brilliant ideas and illustrations, interesting questions, and very helpful engagement with the biblical text, without exception every collection of study notes I have ever seen has had the same problem for me: too much input.

Most house-group resources assume the same pattern:

- A short welcome time when the group settles in and is offered drinks and biscuits – introductions are made and the leader encourages chat about how the week has gone and who has interesting news, etc.
- An icebreaker – something funny or thought-provoking to encourage personal sharing. It can be something a bit random, such as: “If you were a house/shoe/animal/car, what kind would you be?” This gives a glimpse of each person's individuality, and provides a bit of fun, gets people talking. Other icebreakers include games such as tossing a ball across the group or building a house of cards together – anything to loosen things up, break down inhibitions, and increase awareness of each other.
- Settling down to the main study material. This is often presented in sections – so section one might be a portion of Scripture, section two a story from contemporary life, section three a “case history” of a dilemma. Each section

might be followed by a chance for discussion.

- There usually follows a series of questions that take the theme deeper into the lives of the participants – “How did you feel when you read...?” or “Which character did you most identify with?” or “Have you ever been in a similar situation?” or “What most surprised you in the story?” – questions to encourage the participants to own the biblical material, to engage with the theme, to see the relevance of what they have read to their own daily lives.
- Then there is usually a suggestion about a prayer time, sometimes with themes or ready-made prayers as helps and guides.
- And quite often the notes include a “homework” item – some nugget for challenge or reflection for everyone to take home and work with during the week until next time. It follows of course that when next time comes around, feedback from the group about how they got on with their homework should be built in.

To get the most out of these resource materials, the group really does have to work over the whole territory. The welcome settles everyone in and makes them feel loved and wanted, the icebreaker creates some lighthearted effervescence that gets a good buzz going, the biblical material is the core discipling input, and the additional input material creates the vital link between the eternal gospel and the contemporary context of daily life. The questions allow for reflection; the prayer time is a chance for the Spirit to move and work directly with people, and for the group members to open themselves to the Spirit’s conviction, or bring their response of thanksgiving, intercession or penitence following on naturally from the discussion. And the homework creates continuity as well as stretching and challenging the group to test the validity of their insights in the tough arena of daily life.

When I read the study notes, I find myself thinking, “Ooh, this is so interesting! This is such fun! I wonder what we’ll make of this? This is so challenging!”

Hitting problems

But... every time without fail, in every group I have ever led, the whole thing comes completely unstitched, because the resource materials rely on the session being as tightly chaired as a business meeting.

Perhaps the study notes suggest breaking up into pairs for eight minutes to exchange stories of, say, an early childhood memory. We do this, and after four minutes the leader claps her hands and tells us to swap over, then after eight minutes she claps her hands again and insists we all come back into full group for each member to recount the story they heard.

Well, in the groups I’ve known, it never works like that. Either the person

feeding back is interested only in telling her own story or the first of the pair took up the entire eight minutes on his own story and the second person never got a chance, or else the group members get very interested in the feedback and start chipping in with suggestions and related stories of their own.

I mean, you can *train* your group like a dog pack, making them wait their turn and stick to your timetable and not wander off topic and never interrupt and not ramble on – but that fosters compliance and conformity, not confidence and reflection and the ability to make their own decisions.

Exactly because their contributions were always affirmed and respected, because they were really welcomed and really heard, prayed for properly and encouraged to share in depth, the members of groups where I've borne responsibility arrive expecting to talk.

They also want to pray and sing, and to be offered some discussion starter they can really get their teeth into.

The reason study notes have never worked for me is that they seem to assume the group is the necessary resource for the marvellous study notes, whereas I'd been hoping that the notes would be a resource for my marvellous group.

But if I tried being completely non-directive and not preparing anything at all, just letting them chat on and direct themselves, that didn't work either. The talk came back to the same old issues, dominated by the obsessions and preoccupations of the same few members. People struck up private conversations with their neighbour, or allowed the conversation to drift on into pointless chit-chat.

And I found that, although I didn't want the evening to become a kind of relay race as we panted hastily from one section of the booklet to the next if we were to have an outside chance of being done by 9.30 in time for folk to hurry home and relieve the babysitter, I did still need some sense of purpose, direction, and continuity.

Then I have to admit that too often my house-group preparation involved the awful realization: "Oh, cripes, it's half past six, they'll be here in an hour and the supper still isn't cooked and what the dickens are we going to talk about tonight in any case?"

My groups used to go like this:

They arrive and take off their coats and I offer them drinks. They all want something different. Only one person still drinks coffee; there are two tea drinkers and one of them wants Earl Grey. The rest like fruit teas – except the lady who can't stand them and has brought her own peppermint teabag, and the two who only want a glass of water. Someone has no babysitter so has brought her two-year-old, who needs a spout cup.

Got that? OK. They all like biscuits but two of them are vegan and one is a diabetic.

I come puffing in ten minutes later like a newbie barista laden with everyone's complicated choices. They are all chatting happily.

I begin by going round the group encouraging each person to say something about their week since we last met. Forty-five minutes later we still haven't heard three of the people. While nodding in apparently rapt attention I am mentally revising our programme for the evening, wondering whether to keep the biblical material as it's our core item even though it's a bit boring by itself, or move straight on to the supplementary story and just refer to the Bible passage in introducing it.

I ditch the icebreaker completely with real regret, as it promised to be the most interesting and fun part of the evening. Or else I decide to do the icebreaker anyway, in which case that takes another forty-five minutes and then the Bible passage and supplementary story have to be morphed into introductory material for a time of prayer and the Challenging Question section becomes so much ballast overboard.

And, if we sing, they all want to choose a song and start saying to each other, "But what about you, Sharon – did you have a favourite?" while I'm squinting at the clock and mentally calculating what we can still squeeze in.

These nightmares have afflicted me when I have been on the receiving end of someone else's leadership too. I remember attending a group where we were trying the "Swedish Method" of Bible study, which involved reading a passage of about ten to fifteen verses in search of three specifics:

- ☀ A light bulb – something in the text that has resulted in an "Aha!" moment of realization.
- ? A question mark – something that seems puzzling or hard to understand.
- ➔ An arrow – something that strikes home for personal application.

This exercise was done in silence and supposed to take about ten minutes. Haha! It took ages. At the end of ten minutes some people hadn't even finished their light bulbs.

After we were all done – or not really *all* done, but the leader got bored with waiting – we went round and shared our findings. I was burning to share my ? but the leader said I wasn't allowed to – that would have to wait until we'd all done the ☀s – and went round again. I felt bitterly disappointed and very frustrated because I did actually want the group to help me shed some light on my ?.

The ☀s took for ever, and by the time we were halfway round the group for the ?s, it was ten o'clock and we had to stop, and never mind the ➔s. To be honest, I hadn't really had a ☀; I just made one up to fit in and be helpful, and I never did get to ask my puzzling question. And, if you notice, *I haven't forgotten!* That is, I've

long since forgotten the question, but not the frustration.

Do these scenarios sound all too familiar to you?

With all this in mind, it occurred to me that it might help to have a book of outlines that will offer themes, Bible passages, supplementary material, questions and prayer starters, but in so minimalist a format that there is space and to spare for the sharing and discussing that allow a house group to listen respectfully and empathetically, giving each individual enough time to contribute, and for the affirmation that will offer comfort and build confidence.

Then, if someone has shared at length about the horrendous week they've just had, instead of looking at my watch and saying, "OK, thank you. Well, moving on..." there is time to look at the person and ask, "So what will you do about the car?" or "Did he actually call back, then?" This signals to the entire group that their stories, their lives, really *matter*; they are not just the meat for my industrial spiritual sausage machine.

I am assuming that a house group should ideally have the following ingredients:

- Welcome and drinks.
- Sharing: "How was your week?"
- A time of praise songs and worship – or, if singing seems too big an ask, then a time to come consciously into God's presence, focusing and centring ourselves on his loving-kindness and grace.
- Scripture passage and supplementary notes to help us build the bridge between the Bible and the present day.
- Group discussion.
- Prayer time to gather up what we have heard and said, and to bring before God any concerns and burdens currently on our hearts. NB: this prayer time, if your house group is as keen to share as mine always have been, should never be preceded by asking people if they have anything they want to pray about tonight – either you'll be there until dawn or all the praying will be squodged into two minutes. Just start.

The importance of sensitive leadership

The outlines in this book will be too scanty for the Silent House Group, and are unsuitable for the Dominant Leader. These are not the kind of house-group materials that offer instructions like: "First get your group to..." or "Split your group into two halves and do not allow married couples and friends to be in the same subgroup..." or "Allow two minutes per person for this sharing..."

These materials are for the house group in which people feel confident enough

to question and object and express a preference, and want to do things differently, to share a → when you'd asked for a ?.

But you don't want it to degenerate into mere social chit-chat, you do have ground to cover, and you don't want strong personalities to take the ball and keep running with it, leaving quieter people's stories unheard.

Sensitive leadership means waiting patiently for the end of a paragraph when someone is just running on too long, to say, "Thank you so much! Gosh, what an amazing time you had when you were living in Africa. It would be brilliant to hear some more about that **some other time!** Anyone else had a similar experience? How about you, Dave? You've been very quiet tonight. Did anything in the passage especially speak to you?"

In a house group where people are heard – really listened to – they often cry. Have tissues handy, in case. But when someone begins to cry, just let it happen. If someone near them wants to put an arm round their shoulder or a hand on their knee, that's fine. But you the leader shouldn't soar to your feet and surge across the room to enfold them in a five-minute bear hug. Just as they laugh, people also cry. That's OK. It can be affirmed – "Yes, I can see how very painful that parting was for you... take your time ... " But don't make a big deal of it.

Create a habit of saying "Yes" to everything, affirming every person, like this:

✓ "Wow, that provoked some discussion, didn't it? OK, let's see if the next question can give us just as much food for thought!"

✗ "Right! One more minute! Finish your sentence! Time to move on! Are you listening, Brian?"

✓ "Oh, man, I can see you've had one heck of a week. Thank you so much for sharing that with us. Have another cookie! Let's hope you feel a bit better by the end of the evening."

✗ "Well, that's very interesting, but I think we'd better move on now because time's getting a bit short."

As a preacher, my biggest routine discouragement has always been the people, in every church, whose stock of small talk obliges them to greet me with a jocular, "Keep it short!" In more than one church, I have been urged by the steward on duty to keep the sermon short because he was hoping to be home in time for the start of the ball game on TV.

Not many things are a bigger turn-off than being *required* to speak to someone who clearly has no interest in what you have to say.

The sensitive leader will position any clock where s/he can keep tabs on the time without her/his eyes ever appearing to leave whomever is speaking.

As someone once said:

“One of the most useful things you can learn is to yawn with your mouth closed, or in such a way that people think you are smiling at them.”¹

Preparing for your house-group meeting

Once your house-group members are all out of their shells and friends with each other, looking forward eagerly to the meeting, most of the work is done by the group members, not by the leader. They are no longer the rank and file, waiting meekly to be told what to do and what to think; the meeting is a circle of energy and ideas, self-stimulating.

This means that the leader doesn't have to spend two hours holed up in the study preparing input and reading up Leaders' Notes, which is good news if the house-group leader is a busy person with a heavy schedule (as is usually the case). These outlines are simple and minimalist, and do not require a big wodge of time for assimilation.

But, though the house-group leader need not spend a long session poring over my notes, preparation is still essential. The difference is that the leader will not be preparing the session or the input or figuring out how to rig the meeting and direct the members; the leader will take time to prepare her/himself.

Sensitive leadership is about attunement to the Holy Spirit, listening to people and listening to God (which is why we have two ears). In the meeting, the leader will listen with complete attention to the stories and ideas of the group members, alert to what the Holy Spirit is saying to and through the participants.

To lead well, one must become spacious and calm. Harassed, preoccupied people, who have given away too much of their time, exude resentment and lose their sense of humour. To lead your house group well it helps if you can find fifteen minutes during the day to sit quietly with your feet up, enjoying a cup of tea and listening to the birds sing, lovingly holding into the radiance of God's presence each individual expected at the meeting... their circumstances... their home... their families... their work... their church commitments... their hopes and dreams and struggles. The leader will put his/her head together with that of God who is our Father and our Friend, looking intently and affectionately into the wonderful herbaceous border of the house group, taking note of its growth, its state of health, and the condition of each individual who blooms there.

¹ Source unknown; found at this website: <http://www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~sstm/advice.htm>

And the leader will watch and listen for the movement of the Spirit, the prompting whisper of the still small voice – suggesting, directing, reminding.

Early in the week, some days before the meeting, the leader will have read through the Bible passage, the supporting material, and the questions (which will not take long, just a few minutes), so that the thought seeds they contain can have the chance to germinate before the actual day of the meeting – worthwhile thoughts take time; they don't usually come in a flash.

So when the time comes to open the door and say, "Welcome! Come on in!", the leader's heart and mind will be properly prepared, focused on the evening ahead, centred in the overflowing love with which God regards the people gathering. The notes will have been absorbed and considered, so there will be no business of frowningly consulting, "What does it say to do next?" The leader will be ready to flex with the flow of the meeting and to encourage the exploration that arises from the interaction of the group members, holding in awareness the themes and questions offered to help this circle of pilgrims to grow in their discipleship.

Approached like this, the house group becomes neither a burden nor a chore, nor yet an event to be managed, but an opportunity to marvel at what God is doing in the lives of these individuals as they join in conversation, fellowship, song, and prayer.

How to work with the outlines

These Bible-study outlines have the purpose of making strong links between our own lives and the biblical text, rooting our everyday experiences in the nourishing earth of the Scriptures. Each outline has a Bible passage, some supporting commentary, a series of questions, and a prayer. The short commentaries and the questions are all written to encourage us to find clear relevance to daily life in the Scripture, and to identify with the people of the Bible as we discuss their stories and characters. The emphasis is on inspiring a sense of living connection with the biblical texts, finding our own story in the Scriptures, and teasing out the relevance of the theme and study passages for twenty-first-century life.

Each study outline is intended to act as a focus for the group, a central discussion item to support the serious purpose of growth in discipleship that will make the group feel worthwhile.

For the house group to be more than merely friendly fellowship, it is essential to have a deep, thoroughgoing time of prayer, allowing space for the Spirit to speak and work with the group as a group and its members as individuals, and it is also essential to have an honest engagement with the Scriptures. No opinion should be off-limits; no questioning should be discouraged. For people to really grow and deepen in faith, they must feel that *whatever* they think can be heard, without little frissons of shock or disapproval. Neither the group nor the leader is there to "get them to" think or

believe this or that. The combination of the biblical text, the invited presence of the Holy Spirit, and the chance to share honestly and deeply will provide the opportunity to journey into truth. It is important to trust and respect the faith journey of each group member, even if it does not match your own perspective.

The questions that are given with each of the study outlines encourage group members to share from their own faith journey, and explore how the theme connects with their own life. The questions are phrased to build confidence and encourage positive attitudes.

A question in the study on the Bible character Eve reads: “Do you have a story to tell of a time when you, or someone you know, made a really disastrous choice and regretted it afterwards? What did you learn from that?”

So the emphasis remains on the positive – what we can learn from our mistakes – rather than on what went wrong.

I would suggest that, after the welcoming, the sharing of how the week has gone since the group last met, and a time of praise and worship, the leader (having earlier in the week read the material to give it time to sink in and ignite thoughts) should present to the group the themes and Bible passage or passages – probably asking the members to read the scriptural material aloud. There’s a choice then. Here are the options:

1. Wait for comments and responses to the passage from the group, perhaps after asking: “Did anything strike you especially? Did you find anything weird or puzzling or particularly challenging? Did the Spirit speak to you as we read?” These questions should not be rattled off like machine-gun fire but asked thoughtfully, with pauses to allow responses, letting conversation be sparked across the group by both the question and any response. When this time or response has run its course, move on to the supplementary material, and repeat the process with that. Visit the questions provided in the outlines one by one – in any order – each time leaving space for responses and developing conversation.
2. Present the supplementary material at the beginning, right after the Bible text, and let the conversation develop from any points the group members pick out from either the passage or the supporting commentary.
3. Have the whole page copied so that the group members can see in advance what the Scripture passages, commentary, and questions are. Allow the choice of where to start and how to work with it to come from the group.
4. Having read through the materials earlier in the week and given your own mind time to play around with it, start the ball rolling by sharing your own thoughts.

Trust the group; don't be afraid of thoughtful silences; give space for conversation to develop.

If on one occasion there seems little to say and the group does *not* engage in discussion very readily, you have the option of either moving on to one of the related studies in the same section, or giving yourself extra time at that particular meeting for prayer and ministry towards the end – maybe offering prayer for healing, or time to sit quietly and wait on the Lord, or an opportunity to offer up to God those things we are finding difficult in life just at the moment... those things that have especially blessed us this week... those people whose troubles weigh heavily on our hearts... world issues for which we want to cry out to God for his help...

Each meeting should leave loads of space for thoughts and ministry to develop, the outlines being offered only for you to guide with a light touch so that the experience feels satisfying for the group. Be ready with your own questions and responses to the materials, but be ready also to step back – not determined to have your say at all costs.

In allowing the house group to grow in confidence, trust, and fellowship, it is impossible to overstate the importance of refraining from any **didactic** attitude, from **disapproval** to **directiveness** (**Don't Do** anything that begins with **D!**). These are *open* questions, encouraging open conversations for taking faith to a profounder level. In any given session, the idea is not that the leader attempts to shepherd the group towards a predetermined undisclosed correct conclusion, signalling by body language and tone of voice which perspectives are or are not acceptable. The leader is there to encourage and affirm, to allow the group to proceed at its own pace through the interactions of its own conversation to truth it can really own, with the Spirit's inspiration and help. If any offensive views are expressed, or if any simply incorrect statements are made, the leader should feel free to challenge – but as an equal, not as a disapproving parent.

So, for example, if in the study "The poor and needy" (in the section of studies on the Law and the Prophets) someone expresses the view that there aren't any poor people in our country nowadays or, if there are, it's their own fault because they should be more enterprising, the leader might well want to challenge this idea. But not by saying, "I think you'll find..." and proceeding to put down their point of view. Pick up the point, and probe it gently, perhaps like this: "I was very interested in your comment that poverty really comes from lack of enterprise, rather than simple misfortune. I guess that must be true sometimes. But I wonder if it always is? I wonder if there are some people struggling with poverty in our country that we maybe haven't noticed? And if there might be a variety of causes... and what those might be... Has anyone got any ideas or thoughts about that?"

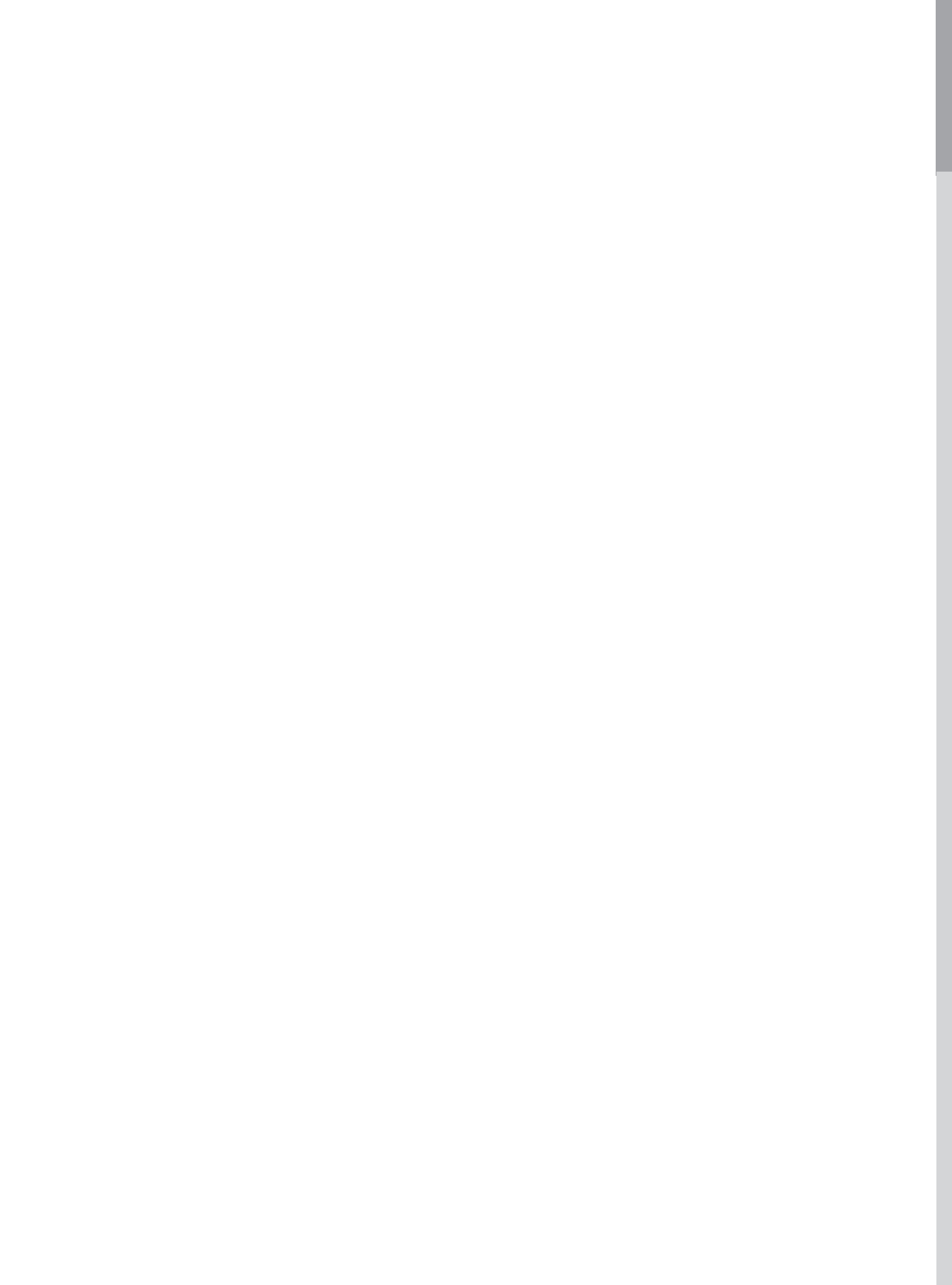
If you say "we" not "you", the challenge feels less threatening and the challenged group member less daunted. If you challenge in this gentle way (rather than saying,

“Oh, come on, Dave! That’s absolute tosh”, even though it obviously is), you offer the challenged person a graceful opportunity to modify an extreme viewpoint and think again. But disapproval or domination will not loosen prejudiced, bigoted, or faulty thinking – it will merely drive it underground.

Where something has been expressed that is simply incorrect, try if you can to align yourself with the mistake. Example: suppose someone says, “I can’t see why it says ‘after three days he rose again’ because he died on Friday afternoon and rose early on Sunday morning – that’s not even two days!” Don’t jump in quickly to defend the tradition of the church and step down hard on heresy. Allow openness: “Gosh, yes, I see what you mean! I wonder why we have always thought of it as ‘three days?’” – and let the group offer the corrective. Or maybe: “Yes, I see what you mean. I always used to feel uneasy about that too – when I looked it up, the Bible commentary said... [explain]... but I agree with you that it only seems like three days if you look at it that way.”

Always affirm, always encourage, always be understanding – never disapproving or shocked.

Have fun with these outlines – may your home be a place of friendship, somewhere people learn to love the Lord Jesus, and a safe place to become more self-aware and awake to the needs and the beauty and the vulnerability of their fellow pilgrims.



“Tell me about it!”

(25 Studies)

Bible characters in moments we can identify with

Adam

Eve

Abraham

Ruth

Cain

Elijah

Esther

The widow of Zarephath

David

Jeremiah

Peter

Dorcas

Paul

Martha

Judas

Barnabas

Mary the mother of Jesus

John the Baptist

Andrew

The boy with five loaves and two fishes

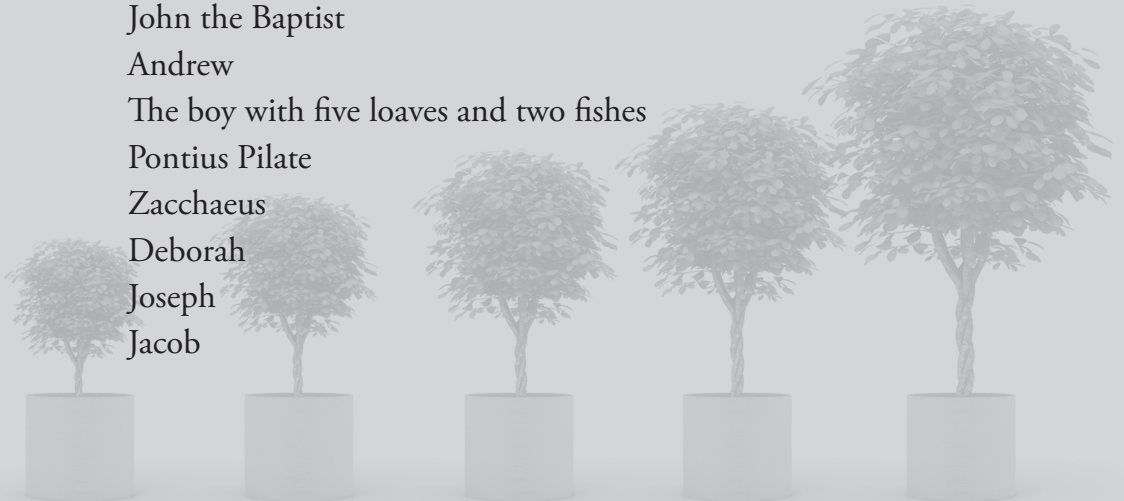
Pontius Pilate

Zacchaeus

Deborah

Joseph

Jacob



Adam

Bible passage – Genesis 3:8–12

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, “Where are you?”

He answered, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.”

And he said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree from which I commanded you not to eat?”

The man said, “The woman you put here with me – she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.”

Commentary

How the stories of the Bible manage to fly like an arrow straight to the heart of the human condition!

The description of God “walking in the garden in the cool of the day” is so evocative. If you ask most people where they experience God most deeply, they rarely say “in church”, “at a meeting”, or even “reading the Bible”. Their first response is usually something like: “walking in the hills”, “by the seashore”, “in the woods”, “at the lakeside”, or “sitting quietly in my favourite spot in the garden”. In a quiet moment, surrounded by the wonder and beauty of nature, the presence of the Lord can be felt so profoundly.

In this particular story, it was unwelcome. Scared of being found out, guilty because he’d done something wrong, Adam hid from God.

It seems so daft to try to hide from God, but we do it. Running away from ourselves, dodging reality, refusing to face the truth – these are all different names for the thing Adam did.

And God calls: “Adam! Where are you?”

It is a heartbreaking moment; losing touch with love, drifting out of reach of the one who can make us whole, turning away from hope and peace – this is what it means to lose our integrity. This is how humanity starts to disintegrate.

And when God finally catches up with Adam, and reality confronts him in the shape of some very unwelcome questions, what does he do? He blames his wife.

Questions

- Can you think of a moment in your life when you felt very close to God – so close that you could actually feel him there? Where were you? What happened?
- Can you think of any instances in the lives of people you know, or in the lives

of public figures (politicians, celebrities), where you have seen them evading responsibility instead of being willing to face the music?

- Is there anything in your own life, just at the moment, that you wish was not happening, would go away? Is there anything that it might help to talk through, that you know you need to face squarely but you have been trying to avoid thinking about?

Prayer

O loving Lord, you see us and you know us. You, the God who made us, search us out and find us. You see through our pretences; our evasions mean nothing to you. You understand us, because you see and know who we really are. There is no need to put on an act for you – and no point in trying to. You are the only one in the whole of our lives who will never be taken in, who will always see the heart of us, who will always understand. Thank you for loving us, thank you for coming to find us, thank you for really seeing us. As we sit quietly here with you now, may the truth of who you are touch the truth of who we are and, in making the connection, make us whole. In Jesus' holy name; Amen.