



Buried Treasure?

Unearth God's riches this Bible Sunday

TALK

This talk involves a range of activities and illustrations and is suitable for all ages. It's organised in five sections:

1. Introduction
2. B for Bible Sunday
3. B for Behaviour
4. B for Being
5. B for Bounty

There are four activities which accompany the talk. These can be omitted, modified or otherwise adapted to suit your needs.

The talk is in two formats: a long format, which is a word for word version and a bullet point version. If you don't wish to read the talk verbatim, simply use the bullet points as headings for your own words.

1. INTRODUCTION

I don't know if you ever watch Antiques Roadshow. What happens is that people take along a precious Ming vase which was left them by their Great-Aunt Flossie and then they try to look nonchalant when they find out that it was made at a factory in Rotherham in 1972. Or they show something that they picked up at a car boot sale and it turns out to be a Fabergé Nose Hair Remover worth £50,000. What Antiques Roadshow shows us is that sometimes we don't really know the true value of something.

ACTIVITY 1: The Price is Right

Have three items (two items and a Bible) with price tags on them. On the front of the price tag you put a value that is either higher or lower or equal to the real value. On the back you put the real value. Get someone to read out the price tag and ask the congregation to shout out whether they think the real value is higher or lower. When they've tried guessing the value, ask someone to look at the price on the back of the tag which tells them the real value. It helps if you have an item that looks worthless but is actually quite valuable such as a first edition of a book.

With the Bible, you can give them the value of the book in the shop, the value of what it costs to produce it and the value it has for someone in the congregation. Interview them about why they prize the Bible highly. Or show the DVD.

2. B for Bible Sunday

We're going to look at Psalm 119. Not all of it, since it's the longest Psalm in the Bible, clocking in at a rather impressive 176 verses, just one section: verses 9-16.

The book of Psalms is really an anthology, a collection of poems. Psalm 119, which we're looking at today is a particular type of poem called an acrostic. An acrostic is a poem where each line, or each section, begins with successive letters of the alphabet. You might have a poem where the first line begins with 'A' and the second with 'B' and the third with 'C' and so on. In this Psalm, the alphabet they use is the Hebrew alphabet, and each section of the psalm is labelled with a different letter. The first section – verses 1-8 – is the 'aleph' section, or A. This is the second section and it begins with the Hebrew letter 'beth'. And that's the equivalent of our letter B.

Which is brilliant because today is Bible Sunday. And in this Psalm, the writer is talking about scriptures, his Bible. In the time when he was writing they didn't have the Bible as we have it. They didn't have the New Testament because this psalm was written hundreds of years before the arrival of Jesus. They didn't even have most of what we call the Old Testament. Probably the Bible for this writer is the first five books of the Bible: Genesis through to Deuteronomy.

And he's very excited about it. Some of those first five books we might find very exciting – all the wonderful stories of creation and Noah and the calling of Abraham and Joseph. And the story of the exodus, of how God rescued his people from slavery in Egypt. There are adventures and battles and miracles and loads of stuff to get excited about. But I'm not sure that's what's really getting the writer of this Psalm excited. So he talks about 'the laws' or the 'decrees' or the 'words'. He's talking about the commands and the promises that come from God. It's as if he's discovered the most exciting treasure in the world.

B for Bible Sunday

- This Psalm is an acrostic
- The section we're looking at is Beth or 'B'
- 'B' for Bible Sunday
- The Psalmist is very excited – as excited as if he'd found treasure

ACTIVITY 2: TREASURE HUNT

Have a treasure chest hidden somewhere in the church. Children can discover this either by following clues or by using a treasure map. The clues can be visual (e.g. Pictures of objects in the church, when they reach one object they find another picture leading them to the next hiding place for the clues, etc.) Or they can be quiz questions indicating where the treasure might be hidden.

Inside the treasure chest are Bibles and some kind of treat. This could be gold chocolate coins, or whatever healthier option you prefer.

3. B for BEHAVIOUR

I wonder which bit of the Bible you get most excited about? I'd be willing to bet that it's not going to be Leviticus! But, to this writer, the promises and the commands he finds in his Bible are fantastic.

We tend to think of the law as being long lists of things to sacrifice. But that's not the case. The law in the Old Testament was about how to live your life. To the writer of this Psalm the law is not a list of 'do this and don't do that', but a way to live. It shows that God was with his people, that God was concerned about them. The law was about religious ritual, but it was also about social justice. There are laws about how to look after poor people, about how to make sure people aren't cheated when they buy things. There are environmental laws about how to use the land. Did you know that the law even has instructions on where to dig your toilet? Now that's useful.

The Bible is about Behaviour. It's about how you live. 'How can a young man keep his way pure?' asks the Psalmist at the beginning of this section. How can we live a life that is pleasing to God? 'By living according to your word.' The Bible is full of guidance and stories to help us. We sometimes think that it's a big book stuffed full of theory. It's a book of theology, or doctrine, or philosophy. And of course all those things are there. But the Bible is relentlessly practical. It tells you how God wants you to live your life and helps you to make changes.

B for Behaviour

- The writer is excited about 'the law'
- The law was about more than sacrifice and ritual: it was guidance on how to live
- The Bible is about Behaviour – it tells you the best way to live your life

4. B for BEING

So how are we to do this? Well, that brings us to another B: Being. The Psalmist has 'hidden God's word In his heart'; he's made it the very core of his being. How many of us, I wonder, make God's commands the core of our being? How many hide them in our heart. Sometimes people have a special verse of the Bible or a promise that means a lot to them; other times you might have read a story from the Bible or heard something that you 'carry around' with you through the day. But this bloke goes a lot further. He's swallowed the lot. Some people take a lot of vitamins. They take vitamin B, C and D and E – a whole acrostic of vitamins, to guard against catching colds and illnesses. That's what the Psalmist is doing here. He's he's taking the whole range of tablets – all of God's teaching and advice – he isn't going to miss anything because he knows it is all good for him.' He's swallowing the tablets as it were.

Much later on in this Psalm, he talks about how the words of God are sweeter than honey. They're so good. They're like, well, maybe like chocolate.

Why is this? He knows that the more he takes the Bible inside him, the more he thinks about it and chews it over, the less he is likely to sin. Because the more you know what God is like, the more you know what he wants, the less likely you are to do the opposite. We all sin, we all have moments of weakness. But as we read the Bible we can see what we ought to be like, we can taste God's goodness. The Bible tell us lots of stuff about God and Jesus. But the important thing is not merely to know lots of stuff about Jesus, but to be more like him. The words of the Bible have to enter, not only our brains, but our hearts, our lungs, our stomachs! Or as some cultures would say, our bowels.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, says Paul in Colossians. When we plant God's promises and guidance in our hearts, then it's like a seed that grows inside us. And it bears fruit; patience, kindness, forgiveness, love. We are all called to be fruit trees. Even if occasionally, other people think we're nuts.

B for Being

- The Psalmist has 'swallowed' God's promises: he has taken them to heart.
- The more we reflect on God's commands the less likely we are to do what displeases him.
- The more we take into our hearts about God and Jesus, the more we will be like them.
- When we plant the promises of God in our hearts the seed will bear fruit.

Activity 3: Memory verse

You could set people a task here: to learn a verse. We'd suggest Deuteronomy 6.5 or the New Testament version in Luke 10.27. They can either learn the verse now, in groups, or take it home with them. You could attach the verse to the gold coins and give them out. People then learn the verse, and when they have memorised it they can reward themselves with the treasure.

5. B for BOUNTY

But we don't just keep these things trapped inside. The Psalmist doesn't lock this treasure up inside him and keep it all to himself. How would you feel if I'd just kept all these coins to myself? No, he tells other people about them. He's so excited that he tells people himself about everything. When we plant the Bible at our core, when we plant what it says inside us, when it starts to transform our behaviour, other people will notice. We can share with them this gift. We can bless them with the love of God.

And the point of these laws is that they bring him such joy. He feels as though he's won the lottery. He rejoices more in having God's promises and commands than if he had a bumper bank balance. This is such a treasure that it makes the Psalmist feel like he's all blinged up. He's a diamond geezer. He's not wealthy in worldly terms. But he has this treasure. He has this bounty.

Do we really feel about the Bible like that? Is it really like a treasure? We own Bibles, some of us own many different versions of Bibles. But do we treasure it? Throughout the world, the fact is that millions of Christians are desperate to get their hands on this book. To them, Bibles are like gold dust; they are desperate to read about God for themselves. They want to experience what this poet writes about in his acrostic poem. They want the A-Z guide to the Alpha and Omega. They want it to guide their behaviour, to make this teaching the core of their being. They understand how important this book is and they want to share it.

The Bible is a storehouse of treasure. But sometimes, I can't help feeling we treat it more like costume jewellery. Good to flash around on the appropriate occasions, but not really important to us. Or maybe it's of sentimental value only; maybe it's a family heirloom that sits on the shelf. We don't want to lose it, but we don't use it much.

So we are faced with two challenges today. The first is to treasure the Bible ourselves. Maybe that means reading it more regularly, maybe that means taking it more seriously, letting God's voice speak to us and shape our lives. And the second is to share that treasure with others. Today is Bible Sunday when we also think about providing Bibles for those who are desperately seeking the treasure that, too often, we take for granted.

That's the challenge of this Psalm. As we recognise the Bible for what it is, as we take God's words and promises down inside us, as we let him change our behaviour and lead us to become more like Christ, then we will truly treasure it.

B for Bounty

- The Psalmist doesn't keep God's promises to himself: he tells others about them.
- The Psalmist values God's words above riches
- He views the scriptures as a great treasure. Do we view the Bible like that?
- Many people today are desperate to get their hands on a Bible. We should share it with them.

ACTIVITY 4: Treasure the Bible

Give each person a sheet to take away with them. On the sheet are the following tasks, each with a gem-shaped 'tickbox' that they can use to record their progress. The idea is to get them to think about the Bible during the week, to realise the riches they have.

TREASURE THE BIBLE

Do you really value the Bible? Work your way through these tasks this week and colour in each gem to record your progress.

Collect all the Bibles you have in your house together. Count them.

Put one in each room, on a table or by a bed. Don't forget to put one in the car – and one by the loo! Put a small one in your handbag or whichever bag you use the most.

Put your name in the one you will use the most.

Open it at Psalm 119. Read a section each day this week. You could read it at dinner time before or after your meal.

Learn one sentence so that you can say it to everyone you meet or use it as you pray.

Take it to church with you to read.

Take it to work, college or school or use an audio or online version.

Join a home group where you can dig out its meaning and apply it to everyday.

After Bible Sunday, get ready for Bible Monday!

This talk has been written by Nick and Claire Page. Nick and Claire are prolific authors whose writing credits include *The Tabloid Bible*, *The Bible Book* and a range of applied Bible teaching in *The Poverty and Justice Bible*.