Youth resource for 11-14s

CELEBRATING THE PEOPLE'S BIBLE YESTERDAY, TODAY, TOMORROW
BIBLE SUNDAY 2011: YOUTH RESOURCES FOR 11-14s

The following session is aimed at young people between the ages of 11 and 14 and has been written with the intention that you can select which activities will be most appropriate for the age range, size and setting of your group. The session is divided into five main sections, centred around Nehemiah 8.1–12.

Within each section are a number of activities and explanations for you to communicate. It is important that you try to cover something from each section, but you may not have time to do all the activities. Each one gives an estimated duration time to help you plan for the overall length of the session.

1. SETTING THE SCENE

Optional activity: The world’s biggest sellers of all time

3–5 minutes

Kick off the session with this quick quiz. You can make this as silly as you want, by including toy buzzers, game show sound effects, prizes, etc.

- What is the biggest-selling film? *(Avatar)*
- What is the biggest-selling computer game? *(Call of Duty: Black Ops)*
- What is the biggest-selling chocolate bar? *(Snickers)*
- What is the biggest-selling album? *(Michael Jackson’s Thriller)*
- What is the biggest-selling book? *(The Bible)*
Explain
1 minute
The Bible is not only the all-time world bestseller, but is also the book that throughout history and throughout the world has changed the lives of billions of people, whether they are Christians or not.

Optional video
2 minutes
You might like to show the video Bible in a Minute by baratsandbereta.com

If your youth group members know their Bible stories reasonably well, this clip is a quick and fun reminder of the Bible from start to finish. However, those who are relatively new to the Bible may struggle to make sense of it.

Use the following link, or google ‘Bible in a minute’:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ar_k8JjVWQA

Explain
1 minute
Without a doubt, the Bible has inspired and influenced some of the people who have shaped the world as we know it today. Some of history’s most famous leaders, scientists, writers and reformers have all talked about the impact the Bible has had on them.

For example, Martin Luther King Jnr’s son recently said this about his famous father: ‘He knew the Bible extremely well and used it as the principal basis for his ministry and mission for civil rights and equal justice.’

Optional activity: Noteworthy quotes
3 minutes
Using Google images, download and print out an old £10 note, an old £1 note and a $1 note (or, even better, try to get hold of the real thing!). Ask the group to discuss who the important people are on the bank notes and then read out the following quotes.

• George Washington (on the $1 note), the first president of America, said, ‘It is impossible to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible.’

• For those people who think science and the Bible do not mix, look at what Sir Isaac Newton (on the £1 note) said: ‘I have a fundamental belief in the Bible as the Word of God, written by men who were inspired. I study the Bible daily.’

• ‘The New Testament is the very best book that ever was or ever will be known in the world.’ That is a pretty good review, coming from one of history's most famous and popular writers, Charles Dickens (on the £10 note).

Over the years many people have left Bibles on shelves gathering dust. Some have used the pages to roll their own cigarettes, but others have read it, got it and lived it.
‘There’s a big difference between the books that men make and the Book that makes men.’
(Anon.)

Explain that the Bible has not only influenced individuals; it has also shaped society, and that is what we are going on to look at today.

**Key activity: Timeline**

*2 minutes*

Place a long stretch of lining paper on the wall and draw a timeline. At one end of the timeline write the word **NOW**. Get the young people to guess the answers to the following facts and write the answers next to the word **NOW**.

- Roughly what is the estimated number of Bibles that will be sold this year? (Over 100 million copies)
- In how many different languages is the Bible, or part of the Bible, available? (2,479 languages)

At the other end of the timeline write the word **NEHEMIAH**. Again, encourage the young people to guess the answer to the following question and write the answer on the timeline.

- How many years ago did Nehemiah live? (2,400)

Explain that you are going to return to the timeline later in the session.

**Read**

*2 minutes*

Following years of disobedience to God and aggression towards its neighbouring countries, Judah was invaded by the Babylonian Empire (centred in modern-day Iraq). Jerusalem, the holy city established by David, was trashed and its people taken into captivity. It was as if all that God had promised through the heroes Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Samuel and David had come to nothing.

Seventy years and three generations later, Nehemiah – a Jewish servant of the Babylonian king – plucked up courage and asked permission to return to Jerusalem so he could rebuild its broken walls and gates. As if!

Yet despite his relative youth, and total lack of experience in anything other than being a wine waiter, Nehemiah motivated and organised volunteers to rebuild the city. In doing so, he also rebuilt their pride and community spirit.

Even more importantly, rebuilding the walls and gates also reconnected the people with the story of their ancestors: their grandparents, their great-grandparents, their great-great-grandparents... They were not just captives of the Babylonian Empire, they were Hebrews, descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Their story was part of God’s story.

We are going to look at what happened next...
2. INTERACTIVE BIBLE READING

10 minutes

Explain that you are going to create a photo story from the passage. Emphasise that this is meant to be silly and fun.

The group will need to arrange themselves into six different 'photos' that tell the story (e.g. one photo could show Ezra reading the Law to the gathered crowds, so one person might wear a fake beard and stand on a chair holding a Bible, while the rest of the group bow and worship).

1. First read Nehemiah 8.1–12 as a group.

2. Read each of the following six sections individually and decide as a group how you are going to create your 'photo'. Photo 1: verses 1–2; Photo 2: verses 3–4; Photo 3: verses 5–6; Photo 4: verses 7–8; Photo 5: verse 9; Photo 6: verses 10–12.

3. Read the verses again, with the group getting into the appropriate positions. Make sure you bring a digital camera or use your phone to take the six photos, and post the photo story on Facebook, or the church website, etc.

Option for bigger groups

Split the group into two or three smaller teams. Read the verses for Photo 1 and then challenge them to see which will be the first team to get into position and freeze. Take a picture of the winning team for each of the six photos.

Option for older young people

Give all the young people a few Post-it notes each. Read the passage out twice and ask the young people to write on the Post-it notes particular words or phrases that jump out. Encourage the group to take it in turns to stick their notes to the wall and discuss why those words seem important.

Explain

1 minute

In the story we see three things happening with the Bible. We see people:

- wanting it (they assembled and asked for it to be read);
- getting it (they made sure it was understandable);
- living it (they lived out what was read out).

3. WANTING IT

*On the first day of the seventh month, the people came together in the open area in front of the Water Gate. Then they asked Ezra, who was a teacher of the Law of Moses, to read to them from this Law that the LORD had given his people. Ezra the priest came with the Law and stood before the crowd of men, women, and the children who were old enough to understand.*

Nehemiah 8.1–2, CEV
Key activity: Flash mob

4 minutes

According to Wikipedia, ‘A flash mob is a term coined in 2003 to denote a group of people who assemble suddenly in a public place, perform an unusual and sometimes seemingly pointless act for a brief time, then disperse.’

Option 1: DIY flash mob
The day or week before you plan to lead this session, organise your own flash mob. Choose a public place (e.g. the town square). Choose an activity (e.g. pillow fight). Text or email your young group with a precise time and date. Make sure you film the action and have it available to watch in the session.

Option 2: Videos of flash mobs (all ages)
A number of videos of flash mobs can be found on YouTube. Here is a link to the famous T-Mobile one: [http://youtu.be/VQ3d3KigPQM](http://youtu.be/VQ3d3KigPQM)

Discuss

5 minutes

What would it/did it feel like to be part of a flash mob in such a public place (e.g. embarrassing, exciting)?

- Why do you think people take part in flash mobs?

In the passage Nehemiah had his very own flash mob – thousands of people came together in a public place to do one simple act: to listen to the Bible. Unlike a normal flash mob, it did not just take a few minutes; it took all day!

- Wikipedia says that things people do in flash mobs are ‘unusual and sometimes seemingly pointless’. Do you think, in today’s society, people would think that Nehemiah’s flash mob was unusual or pointless?

- Why do you think the world’s bestselling book is not being read very much by your generation?

Explain

2 minutes

If you have ever been to a live music gig, you know what it is like before it starts. There is always a buzz of excitement and anticipation as people arrive and the crowd gets bigger and bigger. Maybe a support band comes on and gets the crowd going, but often at some point people start to ask for what they came for: they start to chant the name of the headline band.

The passage says that after the thousands of Jewish families all gathered together, they asked Ezra to read to them from the book of the Law.
What is not clear is how they did this. Did they start chanting in unison: ‘Book of the Law! Book of the Law!’ (Unlikely.) What is clear is that they wanted it. This was not like an assembly at school where you have to gather and have to listen to rules and notices. This was something they wanted. They wanted to know what the Bible said.

**Optional reflection**

*5 minutes*

Encourage the young people to find a space, close their eyes and reflect on the following points.

- Think about your own experiences with the Bible in the last 12 months.
- Think about being at a gig where everyone has come to get into the Bible. Where are you standing at the ‘Bible gig'? Are you at the front chanting, hungry for more? Are you in the middle, or maybe at the back? Have you even turned up?
- Think about what gets in the way of you and the Bible. Is the problem finding time? Understanding? A clash of priorities?
- Ask God to give you and the others in the group a deeper desire and hunger for the Bible.

To finish this time of reflection, read out Psalm 119.9–16.

**4. GETTING IT**

**Optional video**

*1 minute*

Find the link at [http://youtu.be/gmOTpIVxji8](http://youtu.be/gmOTpIVxji8) or google ‘What are you sinking about?’

**Explain**

*5 minutes*

It is not enough to hear something: we need to understand it too. We need to get it.

*After this, the Levites ... went among the people, explaining the meaning of what Ezra had read. Nehemiah 8.7–8, CEV*

After being conquered and taken captive as exiles, for 70 years the Jewish people had been living in a different country with different gods, customs and language. A generation had grown up and seemed to have lost an understanding of the Scriptures or even the Hebrew language in which they were written. Verse 8 tells us that the Levites (the pastors and worship leaders of the time) explained the meaning of what Ezra read. It is likely that the Levites had to translate from Hebrew to the Chaldee dialect spoken by the exiles. But this may also be the first time we hear about ‘preaching’ or ‘Bible teaching’ – so that the people did not just literally understand what the words...
meant, but they also understood the spirit of the words and what God was saying to them.

As the Levites translated and communicated Scripture, they were making sense make sense.

**Key activity: Back to the timeline**

On the timeline write the following three dates: 1384, 1526 and 1611.

Next to 1384, write the name Wycliffe.

**Explain**

1 minute

We fast-forward now from Nehemiah’s time to 600 years ago in England – and what do we find? Nothing has changed. Most people in England at that time were like the public in Nehemiah’s day and really did not understand the Scriptures. This was because, whenever the Bible was read out in church, it was read in Latin. John Wycliffe was a Christian who believed passionately that everyone should hear the Bible in a language they could understand, so he and some of his friends began to translate the Bible from the Latin. The result of their work became known as the Wycliffe Bible.

Next to 1526 on the timeline, write the name Tyndale.

**Explain**

1 minute

Nearly 150 years later, William Tyndale and his friends were the first to translate the Bible from the original Greek and Hebrew into everyday English. Tyndale was also the first to take advantage of the new printing press technology. It was Tyndale who gave the English language many of the memorable biblical phrases (e.g. ‘an eye for an eye’, ‘love thy neighbour’) that are still used today. Wycliffe’s and Tyndale’s belief that everyone should be able to understand and connect with Scripture got them into serious trouble though. Both men were hated and called heretics by the Church and by political leaders of the time. Tyndale was arrested and executed for his beliefs.

Next to 1611, write King James Bible.

**Explain**

1 minute

In 1604, King James I of England gave permission for a new English translation of the Bible. The translation built on several recently published Bibles, including Tyndale’s translation. But unlike Tyndale, who was arrested, this time the 47 translators had the backing of the king. The first King James Bible was published exactly 400 years ago, in 1611. Gradually the King James Version became the most widely used and most influential Bible in the English language.

Before this translation, only the wealthier and more educated people had access to a Bible in a language they could understand. Once the King James Version was printed and sent around the country, however, everyone – including the poor, the broken and the forgotten – could understand that God loved, accepted and valued them.

Today, Bible Society continues to translate and communicate God’s love to the poorest of the poor.
Read

2 minutes

In Ethiopia, 17-year-old Fregenet sits under the shade of a tree listening to the Bible with a group of friends. It is a key part of the week for Fregenet, who spends much of her free time at Hanna’s Place. This is the day centre of the orphanage where she has lived for the last five years since her mother died of AIDS.

Fregenet is one of more than 120 children and teenagers who listen to the Bible every week at the orphanage. They can do so thanks to a Bible Society-produced audio Bible called a Proclaimer. It is crucial in Ethiopia, where about 82% of the population is illiterate.

Timeline

Ask the young people to guess how many languages are spoken in the world today. The answer is 6,912 languages.

Write 6,912 next to NOW on the timeline. Remind them that currently at least part of the Bible has been translated into 2,479 languages, but half the world’s languages still wait for even one book of the Bible in their own language.

5. LIVING IT

When the people returned to their homes, they celebrated by eating and drinking and by sharing their food with those in need, because they had understood what had been read to them.

Nehemiah 8.12, CEV

Optional video

3 minutes

This video was made for blokes who intended to be ‘at the match’ instead of ‘with the missus’ on Valentine’s Day. The idea was that you could dedicate the song to your Valentine and not feel bad about watching the game... Find the link at [http://youtu.be/K_-rf2jVxxY](http://youtu.be/K_-rf2jVxxY) or google ‘pumahardchorus’.

The big question is this: would their wives and girlfriends be satisfied with a love song, or would they prefer their husband/boyfriend to live out what they are singing and not go to the match?

Explain

2 minutes

Matt Redman wrote a song that said:
Many are the words we speak,  
many are the songs we sing,  
now to live the life.

In verse 12 we see the Jews returning to their homes and putting what they had heard into action, by sharing their food with those in need. But that is just the beginning. In the following chapters of Nehemiah we read about the nation rediscovering what it meant to put God front and centre of culture and society as the Jewish nation was challenged to be shaped and changed by Scripture.

**Key activity**  
*10 minutes*

A few days before the session, begin to collect newspapers and magazines.

Hand out the papers and tell the young people they are looking for images, headlines and paragraphs that highlight anything they believe God wants to see changed in our culture, society and world. Also ask them to find things that highlight what God would celebrate and enjoy about our culture, society and world.

Write the words CHANGE and CELEBRATE on pieces of paper and place them on a wall or the floor. The young people can cut out the words and images they find and stick them next to the appropriate category.

After five minutes, spend some time discussing what words and images have been collected. For groups with more Bible knowledge, encourage them to suggest and write down verses relevant to the extracts from the papers.

**Discussion/activity**  
*10–15 minutes*

Throughout history, people have not just read or heard the words of the Bible, but have also lived them out. The following are two examples of heroes who changed the way we live because they ‘lived the life’. Read out how they are described on Wikipedia.


After reading out these Wiki profiles, encourage the young people to write their own profile. If in 50 years’ time a group of young people were to search for their name on Wikipedia, what could that entry say about them? Ask them to pray and dream about what they would like to change or celebrate, as they live out lives devoted to Scripture. For Wilberforce it was slavery and morality. For Fry it was prison reform and equality for women. What would the young people’s profile say? This might be an activity that they could continue at home and bring to the next session.

Once their profiles are complete, ask them to suggest what might be the first step towards their future Wiki profile becoming reality.
Reflect and pray

Through Nehemiah 8 and our focus on the Bible, we see people:

- wanting it (they assembled and asked for it to be read);
- getting it (they made sure it was understandable);
- living it (they lived out what was read out).

Pray into these three areas.

These materials are written by Ian Henderson.
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Historical background in the ‘Timeline’ sections provided by Danny Brierley. Danny is an RE teacher in inner-city Birmingham and a member of Chawn Hill Church.