

SCRIPTURE DIALOGUE

Approached with openness and curiosity, scripture dialogue can become another way to open new windows in our couple relationship. For some, approaching scripture with the aim of dialoguing on it, may be like a journey into the unknown, and while that may be scary, it can also be fruitful! At first we may hesitate because of unfamiliarity with scripture. We may have regarded scripture as a historical work about other people and other times. We may have thought of scripture interpretation as being the province of "others", particularly pastors or biblical scholars. We may say to ourselves, "How can we dialogue on scripture? We're not biblical experts. We don't know enough about the Holy Land, Biblical times, or the way people lived then. We're afraid we'll interpret the passages wrong."

These apprehensions can be quickly overcome as we realize that scripture dialogue does not require such specialized knowledge. It is not a time for in-depth bible study, nor for theological discussion. Rather it is simply a time for sharing our personal feelings in response to a biblical passage, and our feelings are neither right nor wrong.

We may think of scripture as a love letter to us from God. As such, it can sharpen our awareness of our covenant and stimulate us to grow in it. The Old Testament records Israel's experience as a covenant community to whom God reached out over and over with strong expressions of love. The response expected of Israel was their own repeated decision to love God and one another. The record of this covenant has come to us in biography, history, poetry, song, law, social criticism, prophecy, and parable.

In the New Testament those who experienced the Love of God as they walked with Jesus or later in the community of the early church, reached out in Gospels, songs, letters, sermons, etc. to share that Love.

As we read our scripture, we are experiencing the love of those faith communities being poured out on us; a love that ultimately comes from God.

In a sense, scripture dialogue is our personal love letter written in response to God's love letter, and it can be an exciting adventure of expanding our mutual awareness of each other, in relation to some of the great themes of human experience.

The basics of scripture dialogue are:

1. Select a passage from scripture that is meaningful to you as a couple.
2. Read enough before and after that particular passage to be able to place your selection in context. Ask Who is speaking? What happens before and after? What might the physical setting be? Why was this said or written? (motivation, occasion)
3. With one another, try to set the scene - from the outside in.
 - a. Physical setting - time of day, indoors, outdoors, etc.
 - b. Emotional climate of the passage - the atmosphere
 - c. Imagine yourself in the scene. What does the speaker or writer look like? Sound like? Where are you in the scene?

SCRIPTURE DIALOGUE

4. Reread your particular passage.
5. Write your love letter immediately after setting the scene. The basic question for scripture dialogue is "What are my feelings hearing these words said to us as a couple?" Focus on your feelings.
6. Follow the WEDS dialogue technique for writing, exchange, dialogue and select. In your dialogue focus on responding to one another's love letter.
7. Discussion later could be focused on "What did these words mean to me?"

SELECT: We select a passage that holds promise of being fruitful for us. It may be something we both value and want to share more deeply. It may be one of the many sayings or teachings or actions of Jesus. It may be from one of the prophets, from Paul, from the Psalms or some of the other writings. A very good place to start is in the Gospels with the words of Jesus.

HEAD: We read it together or separately. We read twice once for the head and the second time for the heart. We try to listen for the emotional climate of the passage. How do we identify with the passage? Are we there as on-lookers, descendents, listeners, learners, participants? Can we imagine this scene in today's world? What is the physical setting, time of day, weather, how many people are present? What feelings arise in me as I read and reread this passage?

SET THE SCENE TOGETHER: The next step is to set the scene, and an important thing that we have to remember is that no two people perceive the same event the same way. When we, as a couple, set the scene together, we share with one another how we see it - neither one is right or wrong. There is no one right way! Since we are setting the scene for us as a couple, the way in which we individually see the scene becomes a blend. One of the difficulties was (and still is, at times) not spending enough time setting the scene. Setting the scene helps us to come alive---to feel and respond. If we skimp on setting the scene, we're really skimping on ourselves.

We've found it very beneficial to draw on our own life experiences in setting the scene for scripture dialogue---sharing a meal with close friends, a friend dropping in for coffee and sitting and talking intimately with us, walking along a beach or country road with close friends, or sailing in a boat with loved ones. All that we have experienced in our life is a rich source to help God's love letter come alive for us, and helps us to respond to God.

REREAD: Rereading the selection after setting the scene gives it a rich focus in preparation for writing.

WRITE: The basic question is: What are my feelings hearing these words said to us as a couple? We separate and write our love letters immediately. Our

SCRIPTURE DIALOGUE

feelings are alive within us.

If we wait to write until tomorrow, they will recede and we will be grasping, trying to recreate them in ourselves. So we write now.

Focus on Feelings. How do I feel? How do I feel about my spouse? Our relationship? How do I feel about God----about Jesus----about Paul, etc.? What feelings have been stirred up in me? As we write, we allow ourselves to feel the atmosphere that we've just brought alive, and respond to it. One of the difficulties we've experienced in writing our love letters on scripture is when we focus on the meaning of Jesus' words, rather than on our feelings. When we intellectualize or analyze, rather than respond with our feelings.

EXCHANGE When we come together to exchange, we pray that we will be open to hearing and responding to each other's feelings and not become distracted into a discussion or analysis of scripture. We pray that we will respond to God's love for us as a couple by focusing on our relationship.

DIALOGUE: After reading each other's love letter twice, we focus our dialogue on the strongest feeling either of us felt in response to reading the letters or the strongest feeling expressed in the letters themselves.

SELECT: After ten (10) minutes, we select our question for the next day, not necessarily another scripture.

DISCUSSION: Later discussion, perhaps around the table or while riding in the car, may focus on what the words reveal to us about God's intention for our lives, or how we can live these words. This is the time to probe what these words are supposed to mean, or what they mean to each of us now. In other words, the discussion time can center on all our thoughts and perceptions and wonderings related to the passage. Knowing that this discussion time can come later helps us limit our dialogue to feelings, without fear of missing out on some stimulating discussion later.

CHOOSE ONE OF YOUR FAVORITE PASSAGES OR TRY ONE OF THESE:

Genesis 1:26-31 Creation of People

Genesis 2:24-25 A Man and Wife are united

Deuteronomy 30:11 - 14 The nearness of God's Law

Judges 11:29 - 40 The Daughter of Jephthah

I Samuel 3 The Lord appears to Samuel

I Kings 8:54 - 61 Solomon's Final Prayer

I Chronicles 29:10-19 David's Prayer of Thanksgiving

Song of Songs Any Section Love Poems

Psalms 19 Greatness of God and personal righteousness

SCRIPTURE DIALOGUE

Psalm 100 A Hymn of Praise
Psalm 150 Praise the Lord
Isaiah 43:18,19 Don't cling to the past
Jeremiah 17:5-8 Growing in a desert or by a stream
Matthew 4:1 - 11 Temptation of Jesus
Matthew 13:1 - 9 Parable of the Sower
Matthew 21:28 -31 Parable of the Two Sons
Matthew 21:33 - 46 Parable of the Tenants in the Vineyard
Mark 10:17 - 22 The Rich Man
Luke 6:3 7 - 42 Do not judge
Luke 10:25 - 37 Parable of the Good Samaritan
Luke 10:38 - 42 Jesus Visits Mary and Martha
Luke 13:18 - 21 The Kingdom of God is like
Luke 14:34 - 35 Salt
Luke 24:28 - 32 Emaus Road
Luke 12:22 - 31 Trust in God
John 1:14 - 18 The Word became a Human Being
John 2:1 - 10 The Wedding in Cana
John 4:1 - 29 Jesus and the Samaritan Woman
John 13:34 - 35 Love one another
John 14:1 - 7 I go to prepare a place for you
John 14:15 - 17 The Spirit
John 15:5 - 10 Vine and Branches
John 15:11 - 17 Friends
Mark 14:12 - 21
Matthew 26:17 - 30 Lord's Supper
Luke 22:1 - 23
I Corinthians 13 Love
II Corinthians 5:16 - 19 Never discouraged
Ephesians 5:21 - 33 Husbands and Wives
Philippians 2:1 - 11 The Attitudes of Christ we should emulate
Philippians 4:7 - 9 The Peace of God
I John 4:7 - 12 God is Love
I John 4:16 - 21 Why we love