

Acting out Acts: Post Vision4Life



Session 2: Developing confidence

INTRODUCTION

This session makes use of Bibliodrama. You can find out more about this in the introduction to this series which is on the Vision4Life website. You will need to read this before going ahead with this session.

SESSION 2: DEVELOPING CONFIDENCE

The initial aims of Vision4Life were to build confidence, to encourage participation, and to develop fresh engagement with the Bible, prayer and evangelism.

This is what some people said about growing in confidence through Vision4Life:

'It has built confidence in my ability.'

'Vision4Life has given me some confidence to engage with others.'

'It includes useful workable things to do with under-confident people.'

'It was helpful to suggest that I could lead a Bible study because I never thought I could.'

Delivering a whole churches learning and development programme in the 21st century and in an economical way meant using the worldwide web. This meant developing a website and keeping it up to date. It was a risk, because we did not know how computer literate people were in local churches when it came to using material on the website. Just as the idea of 'signing up' was new to our churches, so was the idea of downloading web-based material to many of them.

The Vision4Life website was launched in 2008 with a complete re-building of the site in 2009

The Vision4Life website has been viewed in excess of 80,000 times.

The busiest day for the website was Monday 12 October 2009, when there were 480 visits.

The most visited pages have been the prayer stations, the prayer toolkit and the seasonal pages. All have had several thousand visitors each.

- How have you found using the Vision4Life website?

Read

This 2nd session is based on Acts chapter 4 so read this individually or as a group. Alternatively you may wish to use the remembered bible technique described towards the end of this session.

Notes on Acts 4

This is a trial scene. The confident witness of the early Christians has led them into controversy and conflict. Peter, the church's main leader and spokesman, has been arrested, and now he explains himself to the rulers and judges of Israel. So again Peter tells God's story starting with the events of the moment.

At Pentecost he told of the Spirit's coming; and now a man has been healed (4.9–10). In both situations, says Peter, Jesus is at work, and what Jesus does is testimony to the resurrection and ascension, and to his lordship and power. So today, where Jesus is changing lives, the church will have to speak. Indeed we shall want to speak of this, even

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when that witness is resented and resisted (4.19–20). There is a compelling quality about God's action in the world. It is hard to keep silent. At least it was for those early Christians.

Again Peter referred to scripture (4.11, from Psalm 118). He makes a bridge between event and text, as ancient words come to fulfilment in current experience. And this bridging approach will often be part of the church's message: God's story in the Bible, connecting with God's renewing love in our times, among our neighbours and in God's world.

Peter concluded by mentioning the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus (4.11). These events were a recent memory in Jerusalem at the time. But they are important in another way: any good telling of God's story needs to come eventually to the cross and empty tomb; leave these out entirely, and we miss the heart of God's involvement in the world.

Peter was a changed man. He was always a rather forward character, but now there is a solid confidence about him. Once he denied Jesus three times. Now pardon (John 21.15–19) and Pentecost (Acts 2) had transformed him, and here he is a bold and resolute spokesman for the gospel and the Spirit. Our witness and evangelism too will often gain credibility from our own experience. If we have known Jesus taking us through the ups and downs of life, this will carry conviction in the things we say for him and about him.

People's reactions to Peter were interesting. The authorities were very cautious (4.13–21). Among the crowds and in the city there are respect and support (4.21). The Christians pray (4.23–31): they know the crisis is not over, and they will need courage; but they trust God to keep on working among them. And trouble seems to release Christian giving and generosity (4.32–37): there is a great depth of sharing and mutual support.

Peter's story influenced other people in many ways. Even though he and John were 'uneducated and ordinary men', others recognised them 'as companions of Jesus' (4.13). So even if we are not specialists in evangelism, we may still be credible as 'companions of Jesus', and that may have a deep effect for good among the people and communities we serve.

Acting out Acts 4

You will need to decide in advance how to do this:

- How many people will take part?
- Which parts will they play, read or retell?

Afterwards discuss your reactions to seeing the episode this way.

ACTS THROUGH BIBLIODRAMA

Three possibilities are suggested:

The previous approach in session 1 could be used. The reporter might interrupt Peter's speech and ask questions. This would work best with a 'Peter' who is happy to argue and the debate is then observed and commented on by the rest of the group.

Another approach would be to set the scene up as a jury trial and to allow anyone to interrupt and ask questions or argue with his interpretation. Some people may be cast as sympathetic jurors and others as unsympathetic. Different people might take on the role of being Peter and the scene played several times.

A third approach could be to do as before but to allow the jurors to begin to debate amongst themselves.

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In reflecting on the exercise consider how confident people felt in responding to the questions. What did people feel, especially when they were adopting a position different to their natural position? What thoughts or insights has the exercise provoked?

For further discussion

We thought about Peter previously in the Evangelism booklet.

(You will find material about Peter in the Vision4Life Evangelism booklet on page 27 – you can download the booklet from the website at www.vision4life.org.uk)

What do you think was the difference between Peter at Pentecost and Peter at this trial?

Peter receives a number of different responses to his telling of God's story in Acts 4: speaking to the people (v4); before the Jewish leaders (vv13-22); amongst the believers (vv:23-31 & vv 32-37). How do you relate to these responses? What made Peter believable?

What responses, if any, have you received when you have tried to 'tell God's story'? (note that this may not be a verbal 'telling' but could be silent or something you did, either alone or with others);

Has confidence changed for you during the Vision4Life process? If so, in what way?

What plans can you make to continue to develop confidence amongst the members of your group?

SOMETHING TO DO

Have another look at the opportunities your church uses to tell God's story via your magazine, website or other means: how could you do this better? Perhaps ask some non-Christian friends for feedback about these.

Plan to improve your main method of communication – or start a website, a Facebook or Twitter account to do this.

Plan to improve confidence through mentoring or prayer partnering, for example.

Remember to be thinking ahead about the next season in the year and plan your outreach activities well in advance.

PRAYER

What can we learn from the boldness in prayer from the early Christians? How can we pray in the face of the many challenges we face as God's people in a society that is increasingly hostile to the Gospel? Spend some time praying both individually and as a group about confidence and the challenges you face.

Pray that God will "stretch out his hand" to help us be bold in our local community.

The release of Peter and John could have signalled the end of prayer but it actually sparked a fresh wave of crying out to God and led to a second Pentecost experience. In what ways does this challenge us to go deeper and expect more? Add this to your prayer time.

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Spirit of Jesus,
with us in the ups and downs of life,
may our words, thoughts and actions
be shaped by you.

When our confidence wavers,
may we feel you encouraging us.

May all we do or say
reflect our relationship with you.

Amen

Alternative Bible input: Remembering the Bible

One strategy we encouraged churches to use during the Vision4life process was an oral strategy called 'Remembering the Bible' in which people collaborate in a group to reconstruct bible stories of importance to them and their community.

Are there parts of the bible that you remember as significant for understanding the whole of God's Story? What would you say these were? Give participants time to think of some and then write them up on a flip chart. Accept all suggestions for this activity. What one person thinks important to the whole story is as good as any other person's response.

Do people remember this trial scene? Record some of the things they remember on the flip chart.

EVALUATION

Please try to answer these questions for yourselves:

1. What was the most helpful thing about this session and why?
2. What was the least helpful thing and why?
3. What would you like to try now?

THE NEXT STEP

The Vision4life process is a three year process for local churches. You will find the resources available on our website where they can be downloaded freely.

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