

Acting out Acts: Post Vision4Life



Session 4: The implications of change

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 4: THE IMPLICATIONS OF CHANGE

Vision4Life aimed to 'transform the church'.

The idea came from 'Catch the Vision' which had an inspiring strap line: "Called to be God's people, transformed by the Gospel, making a difference for Christ in today's world".

It was clear to the whole Vision4Life team that we wanted to make a difference, but much seemed to be lacking for the church to be really effective in mission. Many in our congregations did not seem to know the Bible nor how to pray. There had to be a renewing of spiritual life if we had any hope of renewing the world around us. But transformation is not easy and takes time. A process has begun that we pray will continue to lead to growth and change.

Transformation of the church can be difficult for some to contemplate. It's about change and that is not always popular or comfortable. The insiders like it as it is and the outsiders don't get a say anyway.

Here are some views about the part Vision4Life has played in the transformation of churches.

Respondents to Vision4Life have commented on the process of transformation.

- 1 Vision4Life 'has relit the candle'. This suggests that the candle, or the life, had gone out.
- 2 Someone else said, 'Transformation takes time – perhaps more time than we have'. Does this suggest that we need a process longer than three years or that we need to do something else now or what?
- 3 Another view was, 'The Holy Spirit tends to work illicitly', that is to say in ways that may be unexpected and not within the structures. A process like Vision4Life can only do so much to transform the church. We need to be open to new ways of doing things and the power of the Holy Spirit to change us.

- What is your view?

Notes on Acts 12

Herod Agrippa I was king in the Holy Land, although answerable to Rome, for a few years around 40AD. He straddled two cultures but was in some ways a rather two-faced character. He respected Judaism when he was in Jerusalem, but was less careful of Jewish ways when he found himself on Gentile ground.

So we see Herod trying to improve his image in Jerusalem, by harassing the church (12.1–5). Christians had already been persecuted (8.1), and some of the city's religious leaders were glad to see them run into trouble again (12.3). James Zebedee lost his life, and Peter his liberty. The cause of the gospel was coming under threat. But Peter's jailbreak speaks of a God who cannot be confined or constrained. Although Peter felt that his life had been rescued by God (12.11), the situation was still dangerous, and he would have to hide (12.17). There is a tradition that he went on to Rome – which would fit with going to Caesarea first (12.19).

Acting out Acts: Post Vision4Life



Session 4: The implications of change

As Peter passed through Caesarea, Herod died there (12.20–23). An account of this episode by the Jewish historian Josephus matches the version in Acts quite well. There was a growing trend in this era to offer worship to kings and rulers, and on the more Gentile side of his territory, Herod promoted this view. He dressed to impress. There was public business to do, and he wanted to make a point. Yet his strategy was too successful. 'A god, not a mortal,' shouted the crowd. Then suddenly this 'god' collapsed, and within a few days he was dead. So ends, implies Acts, any ruler who harasses God's people and hijacks the praise of God. But the word of God presses on and the church grows (12.24)

In the midst of it all we meet Rhoda (12.13–17). Some think her a comic character. It does seem a bit scatty, leaving Peter at the door while she goes back into the house (12.13–17). Maybe we can look at her another way.

Rhoda is you and me. Whether we mean to or not, we share God's good news in ways that reflect our own personality and foibles. We tell of Jesus being brought from death to life, in ways that show what we are like too. Rhoda was so moved by the message she had to bring, that it got refracted through her personality. And people would surely remember what had made her so excited and happy. 'Rhoda – she's the one who left Peter standing outside.' They would tell the story of that night, and remember God's liberating grace, long after Peter had left town. Maybe Rhoda wasn't too bad a preacher. When she had news to tell, her own personality was part of the telling.

If you want a little comedy from the chapter, why not reflect on the exchange in 12.14–15? 'It's Peter! It's Peter! He's alright!' 'He can't be alright. We've been praying for him.' God does answer prayer, sometimes much more fully and powerfully than we ever expected.

Acting out Acts12

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

In the traditional playing of this scene you may not choose to enact the whole scene as it falls into separate parts. The use of a Bibliodrama extension will depend on which scene you are playing. Rhoda has very few actual lines in the text, but the scene and her character invite the opportunity for someone to improvise. .

If the whole chapter is played, the character of the journalist intervening would not really work. Someone acting as a David Attenborough style narrator standing alongside the acting, introducing and commenting on each scene as it unfolds could be used. The play could then be frozen while the narrator has a conversation with the characters as they leave the stage.

For further discussion

Prison seemed like the end for Peter and his friends. But then surprising, unexpected and even inexplicable things happened in the story. Can you identify some?

Why are these bits here? What purpose do they serve?

How do we relate surprising, unexpected or unexplainable things that happen to us?

Acting out Acts: Post Vision4Life



Session 4: The implications of change

Do we recognise anything like this that happened as a result of joining in Vision4Life?

What is God calling us to now?

How will we keep our vision fresh and relevant?

SOMETHING TO DO

Think and share answers to prayer and how these can be shared with others. These incidences are great evangelistic opportunities

Think ahead about the next event you are planning and see how you could use it as a further spring board for transformation or change. How will the Bible, prayer and evangelism feature in your event?

Prayer

What can we learn from the urgent prayers for Peter? What situations should cause us to drop everything and meet together for prayer?

Do we expect God to answer in specific and practical ways? Would we have been the same as Rhoda at the door? Are we surprised by answered prayer?

What is the most urgent thing your group or church should pray about now? Spend some time in prayer on these things.

Holy Spirit

with us on the threshold to a new way of life,

may we be transformed in ways

that surprise us all –

by our renewed engagement with your story,

our renewed confidence

and our embracing of diversity.

May the Spirit alive in us

be the sign

our prayers are answered.

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 other things that happened to Peter? Record them on your flip chart.

Acting out Acts: Post Vision4Life



Session 4: The implications of change

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.

Acknowledgements

This material has been produced by Vision4life with input from John Proctor (notes on Acts) and David Tatem (Bibliodrama).