

Variety

Variety is a great way to enliven your group. The Bible has life-giving words but it is possible to present it in the same way week after week so that it becomes monotonous. The Bible itself is full of variety e.g. poetry, songs, narrative, apocalyptic, humour, parables and letters to friends. So why not add a bit of variety to your Bible studies? It doesn't take much extra work but, strangely, it is seldom encouraged.

Here are some ideas that might add variety to your studies:

Videos.

For example: Rob Bell made a series of 24 short videos (10-14 mins) from 2002 to 2009. He dealt with topics like security, love, church, prayer, forgiveness, assurance, harmony, hope, wealth, anger, identity, freedom, suffering, generosity and grace. We used the video called "Dust" to develop the theme of faith when we were studying Luke 7:1-17. The group loved it. In the same series on Luke we used another Nooma video called "Luggage" to help us think about forgiveness as we studied Luke 7:36-50.

Excerpts from films.

For example:

"Chariots of Fire" (1981) has a scene where one of the runners, Eric Liddell, reads the lesson at a church just before he competes in the 1924 Olympics. He reads from Isaiah chapter 40 and it is very well done. We were working through a revision of the Old Testament when we used this clip and it helped our discussion on context.

"Flatliners" (1990) is about a group of medical students who give themselves near death experiences as they "flatline" themselves. Each of them re-visit the terrible things they did in the past as they flatline and they "pay" for what they did. One of the characters comments "everything you do matters". You could use this to talk about sin.

We used Tim Winton's short film "The Turning" (2013) when we were studying Luke 8:16-56 and talking about evangelism. Rae (Rose Byrne) is in an abusive relationship and she makes friends with Sherry (Mirando Otto) who is a Christian. Rae asks "What's it like this born again business?" Sherry's reply is a far cry from the usual Christian clichés.

Songs.

For example:

"One of Us" (1995) is a song sung by Joan Osborne. It may not be completely biblically sound but it raises some interesting questions on what we think about Jesus.

"Father and Son" (1970) was from one of Cat Stevens' early albums ("Tea for the Tillerman"). A number of his songs around this time were about "finding yourself". We played "Father and Son" in the opening question for a study on Ephesians chapter 2 where we talked about what it meant to be "in Christ" and how that related to identity or finding yourself.

Bob Dylan made 3 "Christian" albums – "Slow Train Coming" (1979), "Saved" (1980) and "Shot of Love" (1981). We used "Gotta Serve Somebody" from "Slow Train Coming" to talk about how Christians use rules in living their new life in Christ or how Dylan sings it "Gonna change my way of thinking make myself a different set of rules". We also used Dylan's non-Christian songs like "Highway 61 Revisited" (1965) in an Old Testament revision study.

"If I Ever Lose my Faith in You" (1993) is a song by Sting about faith in all sorts of things including someone he loves. We used it in a study on John chapter 8.

Singers do not always have perfect diction so it might be a good idea to distribute the words so that everyone can follow what is sung. Make sure everyone can hear the song too – an iPhone without amplification may not be good enough.

Soundbites.

We've soundbites from talks and sermons to help illustrate a point. Keep these short because there is a danger of turning the Bible study into listening to a lecture.

Pictures and maps.

These can be very useful to get the point across. You'll need a fairly big screen and make sure everyone can see it. PowerPoint is a handy program if you can hook the screen up to a computer.

Guests.

You don't *have to* do a Bible study every week. You could invite a guest speaker once in a while e.g. someone with some interesting ideas, someone with a special ministry that you want to encourage or a visiting missionary.

You could invite a Bible study leader from another group to lead your group just for a change or swap your usual Bible study leader with the leader from another group.

Activities.

Sometimes Bible studies spur us on to love and good works (Heb 10:24). You could specify particular activities like writing a letter of encouragement to someone who has been significant in your life or visiting a refugee centre or doing evangelism or doing odd jobs for old or disabled people or whatever. Then, at the next study, get people to say how it went.

Leading Better Bible Studies by Karen & Rod Morris has a section (pages 135-142) on games and activities. These are intended to help people get to know each other better but some of these could be modified as an opening question or activity for the study.

Prayer.

Prayer at Bible studies often turns into a shopping list with each person adding to the list of needs. A couple of different ideas are:

Print out the prayer points, cut them up and place them in a hat. Each person takes one out and prays for that item during the week until the next study.

Put HALF the member's names in the hat and the other half pull out a name each. At the end of the study (and this might take 15 mins) each person with the pulled out name and the person *of* that name get together and talk about things they can pray for each other during the week. The idea is to pray specifically for the person.

The possibilities for variety are endless. We need to ask people to use their creativity to come up with original ideas and share them with each other. Ask what other Bible study groups are doing. Craig Hamilton in Wisdom in Leadership has some interesting ideas in helping you think more creatively (see chapter 60).