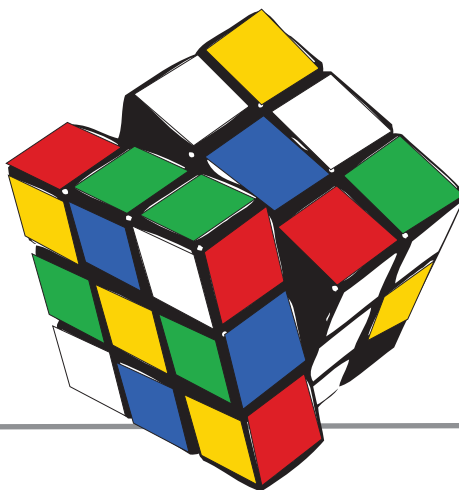


## 1.



# CRACKING THE CODE

## Learning Objectives

Introduce the key question of the Course: 'How does the Bible help us to deal with the diversity we find around us today?'  
Introduce key themes in this course, including:

1. how the Scriptures teach us that diversity is part of God's plan for His world
2. studying the New Testament to learn how Jesus dealt with diversity, and
3. how diversity offers us opportunities to take, rather than threats to avoid.

## Starting the Session

We suggest that you start the first session by breaking the ice. You should tell the participants about yourself, and then ask them to introduce themselves to the group and to say something about their personal objectives for attending the course.

## Introduction

Take a few minutes at the start of this session to introduce participants to their Study Pack.

Begin the session by welcoming the group, then introduce the key question of the Course: '*How does the Bible help us to deal with the diversity we find around us today?*'

If we look at life on our small planet, we can only be amazed by the incredible diversity of living things which evolve, interact, and live together. When we look at the universe, we see an equally incredible diversity of planets, nebulae, galaxies and heavenly bodies that exist together. Everything witnesses to the immense creativity of our Creator, and the astounding diversity of His creation.

The Bible talks about this diversity in God's creation in a variety of literary forms. Although the Bible constitutes a whole library of books – poetry, history, prophecy, worship songs, letters and visions – within them is a consistent and evolving story about God's relationship with humanity and with His entire Creation. The Israelites started by acknowledging that God is the creator of everything, but they interpreted the universal message of God so that His covenant became a bond between particular tribes and God; God's call was

treated as exclusive and nationalistic. In Christ, humanity learns to appreciate this diversity more fully because Jesus opened the personal relationship with God to all humanity and the Incarnation - God becoming human - was the expression of God's love to every human being.



**List some ways in which your communities are diverse.**

Does this affect your life, and how?

## Section One

### The Bible as a Signpost - Not the Finishing Post!

In the DVD, Nadim Nassar talks about the proper role of the Scriptures and he shows how Jesus taught us to interpret the Bible.

PLAY VIDEO ONE

Our Scriptures are like icons:

- *An icon is not meant to be the centre of attention, but a window on the spiritual world.*
- *When we read the Bible, we should go beyond it to communicate with the living God.*
- *The Bible can never be the finishing post - it is a signpost, pointing at something beyond itself*

The Lord taught us how to read the Scriptures from the very start of His ministry:

*‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.’*

*And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, ‘Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’*  
Luke 4:18-21

Jesus issues a truly amazing challenge to those around Him: *‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor...Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’* Imagine if you heard someone say this today!

Throughout His life and ministry, Jesus challenged the religious leaders’ use and interpretation of the Scriptures and what they considered the divine Law.

- *Jesus began with the Sabbath, challenging the way the leaders interpreted the Sabbath:*

*Then he said to them, ‘The Sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the Sabbath; so the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath.’*

Mark 2:27-28

- *Jesus made it clear that we cannot find all the answers in the written or printed word.*
- *Jesus wanted people to re-think how they read and understood the Scriptures - from finding ‘life’ in the Scriptures through applying the Law literally to listening to a person - Jesus - who is the source of life itself.*

*‘You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that testify on my behalf. Yet you refuse to come to me to have life.’*

John 5:39-40

- *When we search the Bible today, we should not do so to find life - we search the Bible to see how the Scriptures witness and testify to the Lord of the Scriptures, Jesus Christ.*
- *Jesus challenged the emphasis on human tradition, which placed ‘human precepts’ above the teachings of God Himself:*

*So the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, ‘Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?’ He said to them, ‘Isaiah prophesied rightly about you hypocrites, as it*

*is written,*

*“This people honours me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines.”*

*You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition.’*

*Then he said to them, ‘You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition!’*

Mark 7:5-9

- *Jesus’ powerful words challenged the way the leaders had turned the Law into a prison of ‘do’ and ‘do not do’.*
- *He made it clear that God is concerned with what flows from our hearts - our intentions, not our acts.*
- *Jesus demonstrated this new way of studying the Bible on the road to Emmaus, when he showed how the Scriptures testified to Him:*

*...beginning with Moses and all the prophets, Jesus interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself.*

Luke 24: 27

When we read the Scriptures today, we must do so in the way that the Lord has shown us, empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus makes the Scriptures universal.

- *In Christ, the Scriptures are the Word of God for all humanity.*
- *In Jesus we have a brand new, direct relationship with God:*

*Then Jesus opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and He said to them, ‘Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.’*

Luke 24:45-47

Allow participants time to react at the end of the DVD.

When the video finishes, your role as Course Leader is to kick off the discussion. Begin by saying a few words, including your reactions to and comments on the video, that will open the door for participants to share their thoughts.

This is the ideal time to direct the discussion by linking the subjects of the video to participants’ lives. Consider how best to relate the topics covered to your own group’s experiences and understanding. Can you think of a time when Jesus’

method of interpreting the Scriptures has helped you to understand a particular passage in the Bible? Draw a comparison between this method and another method that takes passages of the Bible literally, ignoring the centrality of Jesus Christ in understanding the Bible.



**Can you think of any examples where religion is more about practices and rules than about building a personal relationship with God?**

## Section Two

In the DVD, Nadim Nassar talks about the authority of the Scriptures and the importance of being guided when we read them.

### PLAY VIDEO TWO

Our responsibility today is to:

- *bring Jesus to the centre of our understanding of the Scriptures, and*
- *reflect the risen Lord in our lives, actions and relationships.*

God exists in a relationship of love - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - and God Himself came into our world.

- *The Scriptures have authority because they testify to God visiting us in our own history.*

In Judaism, the ultimate authority is the Torah.

*Dr. Edward Kessler: Jews are the 'people of the Books'*

*Sayed Ali Abbas Razawi: the Qur'an is the ultimate authority for Muslims - the Law itself, and the fulfilment of the Law in your life.*

In Christianity, the Bible is not our ultimate authority - our ultimate authority is our Lord Jesus Christ.

The story of how the Holy Spirit guides Philip, one of the Disciples, to help someone understand the Scriptures tells us much about this new way of reading the Bible:

*Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning home; seated in his chariot,*

*he was reading the prophet Isaiah. Then the Spirit said to Philip, 'Go over to this chariot and join it.' So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, 'Do you understand what you are reading?' He replied, 'How can I, unless someone guides me?' And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him. Now the passage of the scripture that he was reading was this:*

*'Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter, and like a lamb silent before its shearer, so he does not open his mouth.*

*In his humiliation justice was denied him.*

*Who can describe his generation?*

*For his life is taken away from the earth.'*

*The eunuch asked Philip, 'About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?' Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus.*

*Acts 8:27b-35*

"How can I [understand], unless someone guides me?"

- *The Scriptures only work if we interpret them through Jesus Christ Himself.*
- *Philip did exactly that - he interpreted them around the risen Lord.*
- *Only then could the Scriptures be brought to life!*

Allow participants time to react at the end of the DVD.

When the video finishes, begin by saying a few words, including your reactions to and comments on the video. Stress the importance of applying what Philip did to the way we treat the Scriptures. If you already bring Christ to the centre of your understanding of the Scriptures, then give some examples; if this method is new to you then you could discuss how you could apply this method to your reading.



**Why do you read the Bible?**

In what different ways have you tried reading the Bible and how has it helped you?

## Conclusion

Wrap up the session by emphasising the different way that Jesus taught us to interpret the Scriptures; it is possible for us to change how we view the Scriptures - as St. Paul, who had been dedicated to the Law, said:

*'Our competence is from God, who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of letter but of spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.'*  
2 Corinthians 3:5b-6

A literal understanding of the Scriptures, without bringing Christ into the heart of our reading, can result in an 'imprisonment' within the pages of the Scriptures. This can lead to a ministry of judgment and condemnation rather than reconciliation and justification.

We are always in danger of being trapped within the pages of the Book if we ignore the presence of the Spirit of the risen Lord. It is Christ's commandment that we become 'a light to the nations' of the whole world, and we can do this only if we develop a deep experience with God through prayer and through studying the Scriptures.

In the 21st century, more than ever, we live in a diverse world – culturally and religiously. Jesus Christ lived, taught and preached in a diverse culture and He used the Scriptures to explain Himself and His message. The Scriptures today should play an important role in helping us to preach the Gospel and to live abundantly in such an environment.

### **Taking the Session into the Week**

Invite participants to keep their own journal or scrapbook of personal 'breakthroughs' - fresh, in depth insights into what it means to follow Christ and to get to know people of other faiths - as they occur during the course. These can be recorded in many different ways. Just like a holiday scrapbook, these words and images will capture the moment and keep it alive in their lives.

### **'Take Away' Activity**

Ask participants to complete the 'Free Time' exercise.

### **The Labourers in the Vineyard**

Please read the Parable of The Labourers in the Vineyard (*Matthew 20:1-16*).

At first, the Parable seems unfair according to our human logic. Try looking at it from Jesus' perspective, to see if you can discover a completely different angle to this story.

## The Labourers in the Vineyard

*'For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the labourers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the market-place; and he said to them, "You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right." So they went. When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the same. And about five o'clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, "Why are you standing here idle all day?" They said to him, "Because no one has hired us." He said to them, "You also go into the vineyard." When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, "Call the labourers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first." When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, saying, "These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat." But he replied to one of them, "Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?" So the last will be first, and the first will be last.'*

*Matthew 20:1-16*

