

Aim of lesson

To communicate the basic truths that:

- The Bible records the word breathed by God
- Through it the Spirit of God can change us

and by doing so to encourage the young people to read it.

Bible background

Romans 7, Psalm 33, Jeremiah 20

Preparation required

The material in this lesson would take more than one week to discuss properly. You need to decide whether to cover all the material in one week, and if so, how much of it to summarize or omit.

Suggested outline of lesson

The Word of God

Read Psalm 33:4-9, and ensure that the students have appreciated the following points:

- The connection (v 6 and 9) between the power of God in creation and his word, or breath. God spoke, and it was done. Compare with a human ruler giving orders. You could illustrate the power of the breath of God by talking about the invisible wind that blows the sails of a ship.
- God's word and breath are not just powers; they are morally right (v 4 and 5).

Now look at:

- 2 Timothy 3:16, where the AV phrase 'by inspiration of God' is a translation of a single Greek word meaning 'God-breathed'. (This is how the NIV translates it) and
- 2 Peter 1:20-21. Again, the NIV is helpful here, especially in v 21: 'men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit'. You may like to refer to Acts 27:15; 17. where the same word for 'carried along' applies to the ship in which Paul was travelling.

Link both these passages to the earlier ideas from Psalm 33.

Now think about the word 'inspiration', and the related word 'respiration'. Both have to do with breathing (the Latin work for breathing is *respirare*), and bring out the meaning that when we use the word in the context of scripture it has all these meanings of the power and goodness of God being built into the words he speaks.

You may like to consider the expression 'Spirit Word'. Although it is fairly widely used, it is not a scriptural expression, and if you wish to use it some clear explanation might be appropriate. Make sure that you do not simply equate the 'Word' to the Bible.

God speaks through people

Look at the first command from God for a written account, in Exodus 17:14, and bring out the point that there was a specific purpose in doing so: 'as something to be remembered' (NIV).

Exodus 32:16 describes how the tablets of stone were written by God himself.

See also Numbers 33:2 (Moses was commanded to record the journeys of Israel) and Joshua 24:26;27 (Joshua wrote 'these words' in the book of the law - presumably appending them to what Moses had recorded).

In passing you may like to emphasise the importance of the fact that from very early on there were written records of God's dealings with men; Moses lived something like 1400 years before Christ. So the scripture is not a set of fables put together after the event.

The Spirit of God drove the prophets to speak the words of God

Now look at Jeremiah 20, and read v 1-3 to illustrate the punishments Jeremiah was receiving as a result of his prophecies. Then read v 7-13, and note that:

- Jeremiah could not resist God's power which caused him to speak (note that the word 'deceived' in v 7 can also mean 'persuaded', which seems a more likely meaning).

- These verses illustrate what happened when a prophet was moved by the Spirit. They contain not only the words of Jeremiah the human being (verses 14 onwards illustrate the same point), but the words of God which he was caused to speak - v 11 and 13, for example. The writers of the scriptures combined in a wonderful way their own feelings and the words of God, as many Psalms illustrate.

The prophets witnessed by their actions as well as their words

If you have time you may also like to consider the experiences of Ezekiel in acting out the judgements of God (Ezekiel 4 and 5, for example), and of Hosea in his love for a faithless woman, that God used more than words when the Spirit inspired his prophets.

In turn, the words of the prophets carried the authority and power of God, and they come to pass just as if God had spoken them directly. When the people ignored the prophets it was to ignore God himself (for example, in Jeremiah 35:15-17).

Above all, God spoke through the Lord Jesus Christ

The Lord Jesus is the fullest expression of the word and power of God, and his words and actions were those of his Father (John 12:48-50). Even more than the prophets, his words were with power (Luke 4:32, AV).

The New Testament writers were inspired in just the same way

The writers of the New Testament regarded it as having the same authority as the Old. Peter wrote of the writings of Paul (2 Peter 3:16) as scripture. Similarly the words of Jesus cited in 1 Timothy 5:18 ('The worker deserves his wages', NIV) are a quotation from the gospel of Luke (Luke 10:7). Note the undesigned coincidence; Luke was a constant companion of Paul in his later years.

Through the Bible the Spirit of God can change us

Stress that we are not good people whose goodness is 'topped up' by reading the scriptures, but bad ones whose only hope is to be changed by the influence of the Spirit of God.

Consider Romans 7:18-23, together with one or more other passages, such as:

- Galatians 5:17. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other; so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.
- Titus 3:3. For we ourselves also were once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, [and] hating one another.

The scriptures - written for us

Stress that the prophets did not just write for themselves and their own day. 1 Peter 1:10-12 emphasises that the prophets did not always understand their message, but that it was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but us. Similarly in Romans 4:23-24, the key words that promise salvation were written not for Abraham alone, but also for us.

Just as the words of the Lord Jesus Christ and the prophets were powerful, so are the scriptures today, as was illustrated at Ephesus, where those who had practised sorcery brought their books and burned them. Luke comments 'in this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power' (Acts 19:20, NIV). They still are 'living and powerful' (Hebrews 4:12, NIV).

Look at some of the things that the scriptures promise that they can do in our lives, by using the Students' Notes. It would be useful to spend time discussing in what way the scripture is able to achieve the things that are promised in the passages mentioned. The list of passages is probably best tackled, if the group is sufficiently large, by asking the young people to work in pairs and to share the passages among them.

Psalm 119:11	Protect us from temptation
Psalm 119:98	Give us wisdom
Psalm 119:165	Give us peace
John 12:48	Judge us if we resist it
John 15:3	Make us clean
John 17:17	Sanctify us
Acts 20:32	Build us up
Romans 10:17	Produce faith
1 Thessalonians 2:13	Work in those who believe
2 Timothy 3:15-17	Profitable for doctrine, ...
Hebrews 4:12;13	Reveal our motives and intentions
James 1:21	Save our souls
1 Peter 1:23-25	Cause us to be born again

Relevance to our lives

The aim of the study is to encourage the young people to want to read the scriptures because of the help they can give.

Prayer

This is the first study in the series, and it might be a good opportunity to establish a pattern of praying with the young people at the start of each study. At the end it might be beneficial to write a prayer that summarises the points arising in the last section, and to pray it together, not just in the context of every day life but as a prayer for the remainder of the course.

Other suggestions for activities

1. Imagine that you have been asked to write a preface to the scripture, or some "publisher's notes" for a back cover. What would you say? How would you summarise its benefits, or persuade people to buy it? Discuss with the class what they would write and then get them to write it.
2. Produce a poster or advertisement which summarises the key messages of this study.