

Bible
NOISE

reading aloud, listening anew

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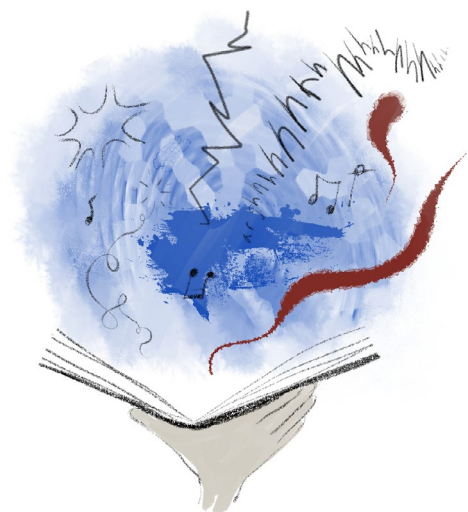
Introductory Chapter - free sample

Breathe In...

In the beginning was the Word (John 1:1)

The Bible is a noisy book.

Many cries for justice
and many shouts of praise resound
from different voices across time
all somehow bound with
the strange sound of God;
breathing "let there be",
calling "where are you?",
taking on flesh,
crying last breaths,
re-sounding in resurrection,
breathing fire
upon the multitude
inspiring voices in loud raucous
multiple tongues
and the ending trumpets
then breathing welcome,
saying "Come!"



Noise is generally described as sounds that are unpleasant. It is sounds that we'd rather not hear or sounds that are out of control. For some people, the quieter it is, the better. But the Bible is a noisy book. The Bible isn't a neat, tidy and quiet book. It's full of riddles, questions, emotions, seeming

contradictions and all kinds of odd characters. We often try to make things neat and tidy but in that process sometimes we do a disservice to the Bible. Sometimes it's in those untidy bits that God's Spirit - the wind which blows over creation, at Pentecost, and at the end of time - does his work. Too often we attempt to quieten the work and energy of the Spirit. Maybe we value quiet, order, harmony in ways that aren't helpful to us. When it comes to reading the Bible, do we bring our ideas of quiet, order and harmony as a way of taming the "noise" in scripture? Are we attempting to tame the Bible?

When we read the Bible, we mostly read it silently. When we do read it aloud, we often have a tone that some people would call "churchy" simply because it's a tone of voice we wouldn't use anywhere else! What would happen if we engaged with the Bible in a less quiet way? The Bible is a noisy book filled with the sounds of story, song, warnings and celebration. Learning to hear and express the noise of the Bible could be a way to get closer to what God wants us to hear in it.

What would our experience of the Bible be, if we expressed some of the noise that is so clearly written in its pages? Noise disrupts the quietness, often alerting us to things outside of ourselves and our immediate world. This is what Bible Noise is: a way of engaging with the Bible through the sound of our gathered voices reading aloud the scriptures.

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Effects of Bible Noise

Bible Noise is also the name of the group that I run with some people from my church. It is an experiment I'm sharing with you as a way to help you read and listen to the Bible differently. We have done Bible Noise in different ways: we've

read texts from different books to hear their similarities and differences. We've sometimes spoken different texts simultaneously. We've used games to hear and engage with scripture. The only consistent elements have been the Bible and our voices. People have had different experiences of Bible Noise. Here are a few responses from the sessions:

"It is really difficult to put into words what it was like, there's so many different layers to it. It was important to physically be with people and share pizza together. It was important that it was a safe, friendly space. But it was a really immersive experience, it wasn't just something that was done to you; it was something that you spoke, you were part of and you lived, so that really does strike home to you. There was a chance to play and be creative and have something living, you know, which the Bible is supposed to be - living to us." *Fiona*

"God gave me key words in particular moments that I actually heard above others, but also a kind of combination of the sounds, I was more conscious of particular parts at particular moments."

Richard

"It was a real coming together and it was really special. They once had to kick me out of the centre of the circle, because I was finding it fascinating, walking around and listening to other people's voices; some voices would stand out and some would be quiet. It was all very powerful and good fun. And there was food!" *Sue*

It is encouraging to hear how the mix of physical gathering, food, creativity and interactivity all combined to help people experience the Bible afresh.

As we've gone through different sessions of Bible Noise, there have also been challenging aspects, as we can hear from these people:

"I had to speak some words that were about pain or trauma, and I just thought, I can't speak this. This is too real for me." *Fiona*

"I had hearing problems as a child. So when people were talking together I couldn't hear anything, just a wash of sound. I found it quite intimidating and it reminded me of being a child." *Anon*

This feedback is important as it shows that different activities can have unforeseen effects on people. Engaging with the Bible in new and different ways can be challenging, and leaders should be sensitive to this. In addition, be aware that some participants might have difficulties with their hearing. Two members of my family are hearing aid users, so if they're present at Bible Noise, I tailor the session accordingly. As we can hear from these different responses, Bible Noise can be challenging but immensely rewarding at the same time.

Structure of this Book

This book is made up of six chapters. The first three chapters explore ideas around sound and listening. In Chapter 1, I talk about listening and contrast it to sight, and ask: how have people listened to God's word in history and in biblical times? In Chapter 2, I talk about some of the effects of listening, particularly the use of our body and the possibility of community while engaging with the Bible. How can we engage with the Bible physically and corporately? Chapter 3 deals with creative uses of sound and voice. I talk a bit about my journey into this endeavour by speaking about Sound Art, which is a range of creative practices

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with sound. Can we listen to the Bible before we start to try and explain it?

The next three chapters examine some possibilities that arise from Bible Noise. Chapter 4 explores the many voices in the Bible. I discuss the stories of Babel and Pentecost, where many voices speak together. How can we value a diversity of voices? In Chapter 5, I continue on the theme of listening to many voices by focussing on characters we might otherwise ignore, by asking: what are some ways of hearing the marginalised and forgotten? Chapter 6 talks of the possibilities of play and improvisation in engaging with scripture. How can we be more creative and playful? I talk about the different possibilities that are opened up if we can engage with scripture through the Holy Spirit's life-giving breath.

At the end of the book are some simple ideas to help you get started.

How to use this Book

Each chapter contains examples of different readings or “pieces” which you can use in your own church, small group or even as part of your own “Bible Noise” gathering. Each of these are available as PDF and PowerPoint downloads, to make it easy for you to use them with a group. Some pieces also have links to recordings you can listen to.

We will start with readings that are simple enough for most people to join in. As we progress through the book, the readings get more layered and complex. My hope is that these readings are a starting point from which eventually you can create your own Bible Noise readings. The readings presented here aren't prescriptive but show us ways of reading aloud and engaging with scripture. You are free to use and adapt these readings and others like them on the engageworship.org website.

Ideally, I hope that you use this book as an opening for a creative engagement with scripture, where you put together your own readings according to the distinct needs of your community and the whispers of the Spirit.