

FAITH on the MOVE

BIBLE STUDIES

Series Introduction

Bible, First and Foremost

Welcome to Faith on the Move Bible Studies! This series is first and foremost about exploring the biblical story. In their original context, the stories in the Bible were not read in monotone from a formal lectern; rather, they were vividly shared around the camp fire or urgently passed on from one generation to another. Coming out of an oral culture, the stories were recorded in a way that invite the listener to get to get to know the characters—to see them as relatable, full human beings, rather than distant “holy heroes.”

As Faith on the Move participants take on the roles of Moses, Miriam, Pharaoh and others, they will have a chance to bring these characters to life and engage their stories directly. In an effort to emphasize the centrality of the text, participants only need a Bible to take part in the studies. Alternatively a Scripture handout is provided for each session, which simply gives the text of the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible divided into character parts.

Shared Discovery

Each section begins with reading a portion of text out loud. Then the facilitator invites participants to share what they hear or notice in the text. These questions help to keep the class focused on shared discovery and avoid the tendency to reduce the study to simply transferring information from teacher to student. Everyone in the session has something to offer and something to learn!

The facilitator’s main role is to create “space” for exploration, openness, and—taking cues from the Bible itself—a good deal of fun!

Each facilitator guide is organized in two columns:

The material on **left hand column** provides direction from various sources for approaching each of the guiding questions. In preparation for each session, the facilitator will need about a half hour to read through the whole guide and make some choices about how to structure the session based on personal knowledge of the group and time available for the study.

The guiding questions and activities on the **right hand column** of the facilitator guide are intended to help the facilitator meet that goal of creating “space” by inviting the participants’ insights or reflections on specific portions of the texts. The facilitator may choose to read the questions as provided or use them as a guide to formulate his or her own questions. Bible study at its best combines both personal insight with the voices of others with whom we share this text—people of faith throughout history and today, scholars as well as fellow believers.

A World on the Move

The impetus of Faith on the Move Bible Studies came from the experience of reading biblical stories with “people on the move”: students at Luther College, a residential school where I serve as one of the campus pastors; Central American and African refugees with whom I worked through the

Lutheran Refugee Committee in Canada; immigrant communities in my neighborhood in rural Iowa and elsewhere in the country that I've been able to visit during my year-long sabbatical. Reading the Bible with people who more easily fit the description of "immigrants" has helped me realize how much—in an increasingly mobile world—migration shapes all of our lives. At the same time, these conversations have also highlighted the role of migration in the vast majority of biblical characters. In fact, at the core of the biblical story are narratives of migration: Abraham and Sarah, who followed God's promise; Ruth, who defied the stereotypes against immigrants by proving herself to be faithful, hardworking, and a blessing; Jesus, who followed his ancestors as he sought refuge in Egypt and spent his ministry challenging us to go to "the other side."

Unprecedented opportunity, as well as desperate need, mean more people are on the move today than at any other time in human history. People in our congregations are on the move because of increased mobility in the business world, because of educational opportunities such as study abroad or mission trips, or simply because of a choice to relocate to a warmer climate in retirement. At the same time, our communities and churches are being shaped by migration. As an example, in my denomination, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, over half of the new mission starts this year were in ethnic ministries. Like the millions who throughout history have responded to the pull and push of migration, people from across the world are coming to the United States. They come motivated by new opportunities they may see here or are forced to leave their home countries because of conflict or poverty. As people of faith whose ancestors were called to go with nothing but a promise and whose God pitched a tent right along with them, we have much to offer and to gain from joining the conversation about people on the move.

As we find our way in an increasingly global society, what are the connections between our stories of migration and those of the biblical texts? I have found that exploring these connections 1) enriches our reading of the text, 2) provides needed depth to our national conversation about immigration, and 3) helps provide a guiding narrative for new immigrants and their communities.

Preparing for a Session

In preparation for each session, you may follow these simple steps:

- 1) Spend a brief moment, in silence or prayer, to collect your thoughts.
- 2) Read through the Bible text assigned for the session. Jot down any details you note, images it evokes in you, or questions it raises.
- 3) Read through the guiding questions on the **right hand column**. Imagine how they may work in your group and adjust the language as you see fit.
- 4) Read again through the guiding questions, this time reading also the material on the **left hand column**. Highlight or underline parts you find particularly helpful or make additional notes that may enhance your ability to lead the session. Make choices about any extra activities you may want to include.
- 5) Prepare enough copies of Bibles or the Scripture handout for all participants.

As you use these studies, we would welcome your feedback. Please write to migratingfaith@gmail.com or visit <http://faithonthemove.ning.com>.