

Abstract

Elaine Pentland, "Mining in the Darkness for the Things That Sparkle: understanding the barriers, challenges and resources to aid the diligent mining of scripture for the truth that forms disciples," MTh. Church of Ireland Theological Institute Dublin, 2022.

Job Chapter 28 describes searching for wisdom as mining for sapphires and gold dust. However, there is a widely recognised decline in biblical literacy within Western Christianity. This dissertation examines current barriers and challenges to effective Bible engagement. In addressing the barriers and challenges, this dissertation attempts to uncover appropriate models and resources to better equip members of the Church of Ireland to participate in disciple-forming personal and collective Bible engagement.

A sample of rectors within the dioceses of Down and Dromore participated in qualitative interviews. The findings formed the bases for a review of biblical and scholarly interpretation of Bible engagement. Further investigation was carried out to review barriers and challenges with two focus groups of lay members within a particular parish church. They tested four models of engagement with a view to producing the Bible engagement envisioned by rectors, scholarship and Scripture itself. Data have been collected analysed and coded through qualitative interviews, literature review and focus group testing, based on emergent systematic focus group design by action research.

This dissertation asserts four outcomes of biblical engagement that forms disciples: personal encounter, formation of identity, growth in spiritual discipline, and confidence for mission. The rectors' identified internal and external cultural challenges along with barriers of apathy, fear, embarrassment, avoidance of challenge and privatisation of faith. Their solution was intentional strategy and modelled leadership. The focus groups identified understanding, as key to effective Bible engagement, of which scripture and scholarship highlighted delight as foundational to this understanding. Testing models of engagement, underlined the need for variety and the importance of community reading.

Key words: Bible engagement, personal encounter, identity, discipline, mission, strategy, leadership, understanding, delight, variety and community