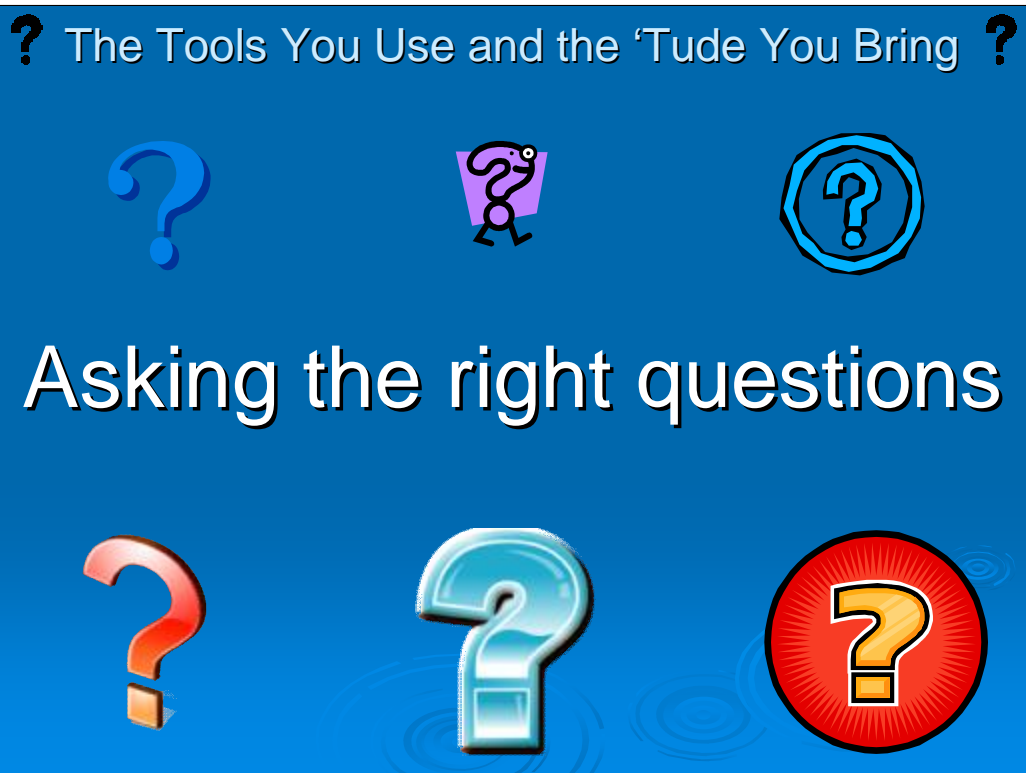




This is a presentation Naomi and Adrian developed and presented at a Bible engagement conference in Malaysia in October 2009. Its designed to work through the underpinning approach and attitudes we've found to work regarding engaging youth with the Bible – in our western context. Its titled '**The tools (resources etc)you use and the attitude you bring**' –to the mission of engaging youth with the Bible . The 3 circle shows how the ability for a young person to see how their own story (stories) overlap with God's story (the Biblical narrative), and the story of the community of which they are a part.



We've found a key to engaging youth is in the sorts of questions you use. Open questions that aren't 'leading', and don't presuppose an answer.



Asking the right questions



Why do we see this as important?

- It establishes an understanding of the culture, context, values and history/aspirations of the people you're seeking to engage in order to be effective

In the whole process of seeking to engage people with God's Word, we must be mindful of, and have confidence in, the fact that God is at work in their lives. It's our role to tap into what God's already doing.



Asking the right questions



Questions to ask of a young person

1. What do you honestly find helps you in working out your life? Where does the Bible fit (or doesn't it)?
2. Can you describe a moment/experience/approach with the Bible that was great or works for you? (Be specific. What happened/what did you experience? What was your expectation of it? Was there a story behind what you did?)
3. Can you think of one Bible resource or tool that you've found helpful?
4. What's one obstacle or issue that stops you engaging with the Bible more?

These sorts of questions are transferrable into most contexts and cultures. The delivery and format in which they are asked may change though, depending on cultural dynamics in some countries.



Asking the right questions



Questions to ask about the culture

1. What are the stories/events that are shaping the young people?
2. Who are their heroes?
3. Who/what is influencing them?
(It could be a current song, movie, sub-culture or popular identity they relate to)
4. What does a day in the life look like for one of these young people?

These are some general questions which might help you gain a picture of the culture, the thinking, and key influences of youth you're seeking to engage with.



Asking the right questions



Questions to ask about the culture

5. What's your hunch about the young person's response/attitude to the Bible?
6. Where do they go for advice?
(For comfort, perspective, courage...)
7. What level can they read at?
(Do they like reading?)



Asking the right questions



Responses that indicate engagement

- Outrage
- Anger
- Confusion
- Delight
- Dismissive
- Openness
- Inquiring
- Interested to know more
- Changed life/values/behaviour

Responses that indicate no engagement

- Boredom
- Neutrality

This addresses the question 'How do we know when a young person **IS** engaging with the Bible?'

It's a difficult question – but here are some suggestions. Its not all about having a positive, affirming response to indicate engagement, rather a negative response also indicates they are engaged!, and can be ultimately a positive thing in that it can be God at work in their lives.

 The Tools You Use and the 'Tude You Bring 



Uncovering assumptions



| Uncovering assumptions | |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Our assumptions | Their assumptions? |
| Respect for the Bible (God's Word) | Old religious book |
| Relevant | Out of date |
| Historically valid | Historically unproven |
| Useful | Irrelevant for today |
| Important | For some people |
| Powerful | Just words in a book |
| We know it (we're experts) | See it/hear it from a new and different perspective (it might be right) |

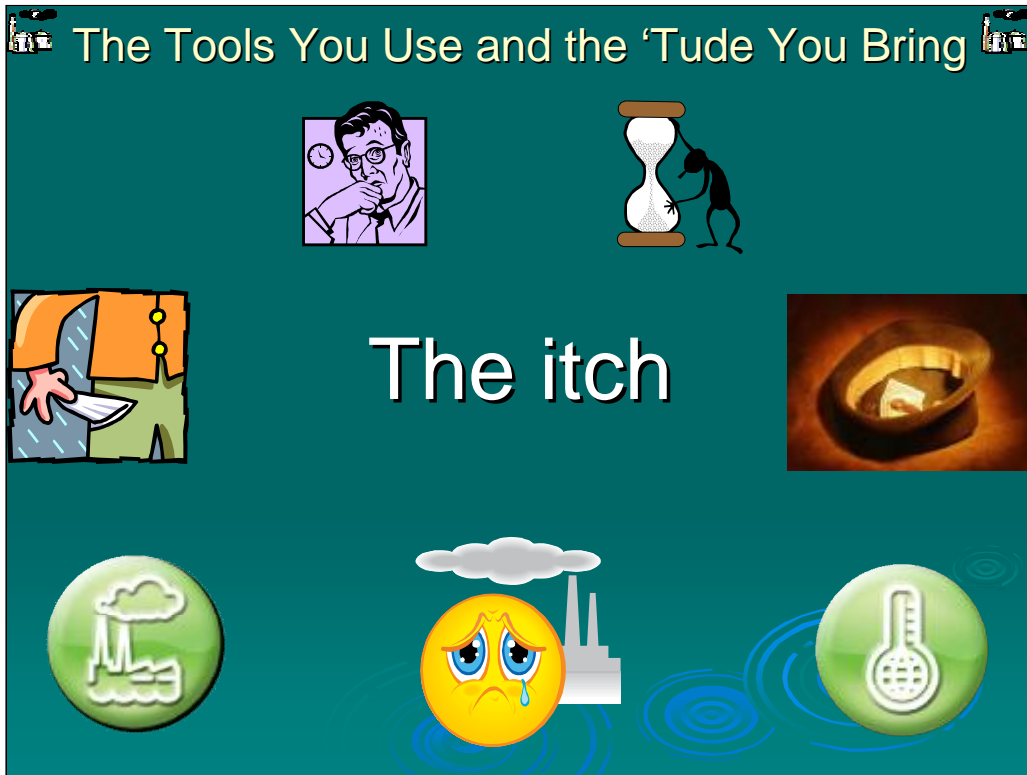
Assumptions are important to acknowledge and be aware of. We all have them – based on our upbringing, our own cultural context, and our influences. We just don't often have to 'name' them. However, if we can identify them, it can serve to build a bridge of understanding between us and a young person. We can better understand how and why they view things the way they do, and why they have the blocks/issues or assumptions about the Bible (and God, the church etc)



Uncovering assumptions



- Not assuming your audience is in line with your assumptions is an important start.
- Once you have an understanding of their assumptions, the goal is to engage them where they are in their thinking and assumptions, and expose them to your assumptions – without ‘dragging’ them there.
- Your goal will be to begin to bridge the gap/s from their starting point to yours. You want them to taste an alternative to their negative assumptions.



What do you understand your role to be in doing ministry/evangelism with youth?

This is about seeing your/our role as 'creating an itch', as opposed to simply scratching it – or giving the answers, or telling them what they need to do/believe etc.

Encourage them to be intrigued, to questions, to want to know more.



The itch



What's the itch?

- The issue, topic or need that's felt/recognised by the young people.

Our goal is not to scratch where there isn't an itch: eg. a bible study on a theological truth that kids don't care about. Using a current or presenting issue as the starting point creates urgency & demonstrates relevance.





The itch



Scratching the itch

- Using the right tool
(Utilising learning styles to engage kids.
Deliberately connecting through your
approach as well as content)
 - Non-book culture (literacy issues)
 - Low-tech options (no online facility)
 - Using environment to enhance the story





Its important to have an array of resources, supports and knowledge sources on which you can draw depending on the situation.

Its never a 'one size fits all' when we try to engage youth.



The toolbox approach



- Having a versatile range of resources from which you can draw depending on who you are trying to engage
- Become a collector of
 - resources
 - websites
 - ideas
 - articles/stories
 - people resources
 - visual aids
 - partnerships with like-minded organisations



How we view, understand and interact with the Bible will shape our practises. So if we see the Bible as simply a book of history, or a book of 'helps', or a something static – then we will communicate this (mostly unconsciously).

If we see it as a living word, through which God speaks to us, then this will come through in what we say and do.



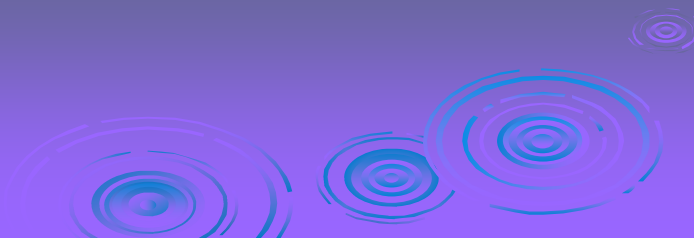
Don't put the Bible in a box



Have confidence in the Bible

- Through reading it,
- Wrestling with it,
- Hearing from God through it and
- Talking with others about it

If you're doing this, you will naturally and easily talk about it with others.





Don't put the Bible in a box



Don't get into a rut

- Watch out for 'reductionism'
(which is rife in our Bible use)

It's not just a devotional resource NOR is it a rule-book. It's political, poetic, an unfolding saga and a living word.

Reductionism is where we 'reduce' the Bible to something small and confined. Maybe a book of poetry, a book of difficult and out-dated stories, a book I go to when im feeling down and need encouragement. Its when we just use it as a daily reading – in order for us to feel we're doing the right thing as a Christian.



Don't put the Bible in a box



Be a life-long learner about the Bible

- Seek to understand some of the culture,
- Get inside the stories,
- Understand a bit about the language

Bring this ever-changing knowledge to the conversation with youth! If it's fresh for you, it helps it be for them, too.

Your own story of the significance and life-changing nature of Scripture will come through in your ministry. If the Bible is indeed a living, on-going story for you, then you will naturally speak of it and model engagement of it in those ways.