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## Imprint

This project workbook is a manual for the Bible Reading Project “Reading the Bible through the Eyes of Another” which is part of the EMS Focus 2015-2019 under the title „Life in Fullness for All – Mission in Solidarity“.

The project workbook is available in German, English and Indonesian language.

**Download:**

https://ems-online.org/en/active-worldwide/international-bible-project

Please send your questions to: bibleproject@ems-online.org

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Dear Readers,

The title of the new EMS Focus 2015-2019 is: “LIFE IN FULLNESS FOR ALL!”

By any measure, a most auspicious goal. Are these meaningful words? Or just a slogan which we as Christians endorse and share with people of other religions?

What is meant by “Fullness for All”? How can all be included when the political, social and economic conditions under which we live are so unequal and unjust?

In the international EMS Fellowship we plan to draft a vision of a “Life in Fullness for All” and to focus particularly on those living at the margins. As Christian women and men are called upon to act and to raise peoples’ hopes, particularly where people cannot make their own voices heard.

Accordingly, it is hardly a coincidence that the second part of the EMS Focus title is: “Mission in Solidarity”

This encourages relationships among people who are diverse. We, the EMS Fellowship, know of the enrichment which this diversity brings. We have experienced what can happen when people respect each other and strive to understand each other better. Our new Bible project aims to reinforce this through intercultural Bible reading and by providing a framework for acting in solidarity with each other.

You are warmly invited to join in!

With cordial greetings from the International Project Team and the EMS Secretariat,

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(Bible Reading Project)

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Reading the Bible through the Eyes of Another –
EMS Bible Reading Project

What’s the project about?
With this project, EMS is helping groups of various cultural and national backgrounds to „join hands“ around the Bible by reading biblical texts together. In practice, two groups enter into a partnership arrangement. They select their biblical texts together, they share their insights with each other and, by employing the views of the partner group, experience these texts anew.

One tool to work with is the Project Workbook with six Bible texts chosen by an international project team on specific topics for the interaction in the groups.

The process: Two groups form a tandem and read a Bible text in their own language with their own “cultural glasses”. Afterwards, the groups exchange their insights and thoughts about the biblical passage.

Who can participate?
Together with other interested persons (your group), you look for a partner group coming from a context, church, language or country different from your own.

This way, existing international partnership groups can breathe new life into their relationships. Congregational groups can take up contact with congregations overseas. Youth groups enter into an exchange with other youth groups, Seminary students connect with other Seminary students in other parts of the world.

A myriad of possibilities!

What’s the goal?
A new intercultural understanding will develop through “reading the Bible through different cultural glasses”. You may discover new, strange, exciting, inspiring insights. Experience how the Bible text will speak into your own context and life reality.

Finally, you will be invited to choose a joint action of solidarity which will connect you with your partner group.

Three international workshops (now scheduled for Germany, Ghana, India) will bring together delegates from different partner groups who share the „fruits“ of their common journey.

How to join in?
You register as a group at:

https://ems-online.org/en/active-worldwide/international-bible-project

beginning in November 2015 until March 1, 2016.

If you need assistance in finding a partner group, we will be happy to help you. The Project Workbook is available in German, English and Indonesian and can be downloaded at:

www.ems-online.org

To get the process moving, your group and your partner group will agree on two or three biblical texts, defining a period of reading time and setting a date for sending reports.
**BIBLE SHARING – A method from South Africa**

Bible Sharing is a specific approach to reading the Bible within groups developed in South Africa. Bible Sharing offers each member of the group the chance to participate actively and express freely the way in which the Bible text speaks to him or her.

**We propose seven possible steps:**

1. **Opening**
   Facilitator or another member of the group speaks an opening prayer. You can also sing a spiritual song.

2. **Reading the Bible**
   All participants receive the same Bible text or translation. One person reads the text aloud once or twice. A time of deep silence follows when everyone can meditate on the text.

3. **Giving voice to the biblical text**
   Participants are asked to pronounce loudly one sentence, one word or part of a sentence from the Bible text which spoke to her or him in a special way. There is no time pressure, just short periods of silence between individual contributions.

4. **Meditating in silence**
   The facilitator invites the group to stay silent for a period of time. During this time, participants meditate and listen with their “inner ear” to the words just expressed in the group.

5. **Sharing insights**
   Participants are invited to tell each other which sentence touched them especially and why. They may also express negative feelings. Information regarding the historical background of the biblical text can be given (compare remarks of the project team).

   The overall goal is to find out how biblical texts speak to us. As this is a worldwide project, it is important for us that everyone is invited to listen to each other beyond boundaries and to learn from each other.

6. **Acting together**
   In South Africa during Apartheid it was important for the groups to achieve joint actions after jointly reading the Bible. Which concrete solidarity action can your group develop with your partner group?

7. **Closing**
   Bible Sharing is closed with a prayer and/or song.
INTRODUCTORY PRAYER

God, our Comforter and Redeemer:
We give thanks for the gift of your Word.
We have it in written form in the Bible,
Given to us to have and to hold,
To read and to study,
To serve as a challenge and a guide
As we seek to live our lives according to your will.
Your one Word is often understood in many different ways.
This gives us the opportunity to listen and learn from each other.
Grant us a willing spirit as we seek to do exactly this.
Be with us now as we turn to the Bible.
Bless our deliberations.
Strengthen those who take on the difficult task of communicating in writing the thoughts we gather during this meeting.
Let all that we do or say today be done in the name of your peace,
The peace which surpasses all understanding.

Amen.

CLOSING PRAYER

Good and Gracious God:
Thank you for the time we have spent together today.
As always, your Word has bound us together, whether near or far.
Until we meet again, let it continue to be the bind between us.
Bless all of those who are participating in the Bible Reading Project.
Grant us the strength to carry on when we feel our enthusiasm waning.
Grant us the courage to state boldly and forthrightly what we believe your Word is teaching us.
Grant us the humility to accept the insights others may offer as equal to our own.
Teach us to act in concert with each other, whether we are in Europe, in Africa or in Asia. Strengthen our resolve to do so.
Let all that we do be in the service of peace and understanding among all people, wherever they may be.

Amen.
Isaiah 2 | Invitation to the divine peace pilgrimage

Outside of UN building in New York there is a wall bearing the inscription, “They will beat their swords into plowshares …” (Isa 2: 4). This verse of Isaiah corresponds closely to the Article 2(4) of the UN Charter: “All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force…”

Isaiah 2:1-5 talk about the future of the House of God, Isaiah 2:6-22 about the judgement on the House of Jacob. “The Lord is the source of justice and peace” this is the fundamental theme and connecting link between these two sections, with future orientation.

The nations’ submission and their pilgrimage to the Lord (Isaiah 2:2-4) were prominent topics of theological discussion during exilic and post-exilic era, when themes like international peace and justice became more relevant to the life of the people.

These verses talk about the pilgrimage of a large number of people to Zion, God’s place and centre of his rule, seeking God’s peace and justice. There is no possible individual but collective pilgrimage mentioned here - a challenge to the self-centeredness and mere individualism. The ultimate aim of the pilgrimage: working together in harmony to bring God’s reign to the world?

The Lord is not depicted as king in v. 3, but as a teacher – a traditional view of priests in ancient Israel. After learning from the teaching of the Lord, the nations destroy the weapons of war. It is not God who destroys the weapons but the people themselves change their attitude and convert them to equipments that can be useful for the wellbeing of all creations. The nations come to Zion to learn from the Lord the ways of justice. The pilgrimage is meant to learn the value of justice and peace and to bring those values to the rest of the world.

Isaiah 2:6-22 speaks of God’s judgement on those who stand as a hindrance to peace and justice. Everyone, including God’s people, will be treated equally, there is no “we” and “the other” for God. These verses are God’s invitation to go near to God’s place to learn justice and peace and bring them to the world and a warning to those who depend more on their achievements, attitudes and worldviews (v. 8).

The text talks about radical transformation from nationalism, conflict and dispute to unity, peace and harmony. Conflicts and tensions continue even in the new age. But there will be a peaceful settlement, which transcends individual or national interest. There is a contrast existing between the ideal ‘Zion’ (Isaiah 2: 2-4) and the current status of its people. This is frequently portrayed through the imagery of height and depth. ‘Zion’ as the highest mountain; the people, however, in their lowest state of being. That state demands a pilgrimage to the Lord’s place to bring peace and justice in the world.

Questions for the group:
- How can Christians as individuals and congregations function in the society to bring peace and justice?
- Look at your specific context: Where do you see signs of transformation from hostility to reconciliation?
- Do you see any concrete steps of solidarity you can request from your partners in “Reading the Bible…”?
Mark 9: 33-37/41 | Who is the greatest?

In our text we find a conflict, the disciples are arguing on their way about who is the greatest among them. Just before that story Jesus had spoken about his coming suffering, death, and resurrection. But obviously the disciples did not understand what Jesus was saying. Their confusion arose partly because they expected a conquering king rather than a crucified rabbi (teacher). It ran counter to their idea of greatness as well as our own. Doesn’t our society equate greatness with titles, power, prestige, and wealth? What has servanthood to do with greatness?

Power and ranking are important parts of our lives. In Cameroon for example, many formal occasions fail because guests do not think they have been seated appropriately for their social position. Sometimes men quarrel over their rank. Political movements can fail because someone’s ego was not properly messaged.

The standards of the Kingdom of God are not the standards of this world. It is not wrong to want recognition and esteem. These are vital human needs. But how do we attain it? The world follows a pyramid type structure that gets narrower at the top. Jesus, however, turned the whole thing upside-down by suggesting that the greatest is willing to be the least. Greatness is found in those who can welcome a little child in their midst and centre of attention. The mission of Jesus was to rescue, reclaim, and restore those who lay helpless, tossed to and fro by the storms of life. Jesus came as one who brought faith, hope, and a new life to those who were filled with sadness, doubt, and despair. Do you want to be great? Then take whatever greatness you’ve achieved as the world measures greatness and use it. Use it as a launching pad for others in a capacity of helping and sharing.

If in the world we become great by putting ourselves forward to be recognized, clawing our way to the top while pushing others down, being arrogant and self-centered. If being great in the world means being served by others – in God’s kingdom being great means serving others. Putting yourself below the lowly one, so that you can love and minister to their needs. Instead of the lowly ones focusing on you and lifting you up, you focus on them and lift them up by serving them. In the kingdom the feeblest service will be accepted, and acts of love that may be forgotten by others, it will be remembered by God, and rewarded in heaven (v.41).

Jesus Christ, came to this earth to serve. Jesus Christ gave his life as a ransom for all. We are to follow his example and let God’s love shine through us today to all humankind. Let us and our nations stop seeking worldly greatness among ourselves, and be at peace with one another. This is the promising way we can eliminate the conflicts we have in the world today. This is the way to achieve Life with a capital L: the life in all its fullness, or abundant life, that Jesus promises (John 10.10). This is life in all its dimensions, including liberation of the oppressed and marginalized, healing and reconciliation of broken communities and the restoration of peace and justice.

Questions for the group:
- How do we try to be better than others in our church/community? Positive/negative implications
- How does it look like in our context “clinging to positions of power”?
- Marginalized, and suffering people should be given equal opportunities to the possibilities that God has set before them - without the impediments that the unjust social structures and self-centered individuals create. How can we offer solidarity to them?
Philippians 2:1-10 | Living together in Diversity

1. Paul wrote this letter to the congregation in Philippi. The members of this congregation were Christians as well as Jews who had converted to Christianity. There were disputes among the congregation. And Paul warns in his letter that differences must not be allowed to destroy congregational life. Paul says that differences are considered to be normal but that - in the face of all differences - there is a common goal ahead for all. He suggests accepting existing differences and attending to one another.

2. God created the world and what is in the world in diversity, plants and animals as different pairs, human beings with different faces and talents and everybody has his or her own human mind and opinion. The aim of this diversity is to complement one another just as the rainbow with its different colours forms a unity and appears in full beauty. Paul wants the members of the congregation in Philippi to be united in heart, in thinking, in love, in one mind and in their aims so that everybody attends to the other and is not only focussed on his or her own interests. Paul speaks of one example: God is the sovereign of the world, but He wants to come and visit us in Jesus Christ who has sacrificed himself for his people. That is why Jesus emptied himself and became human. God does not only think of himself but thinks of us and attends to us. God does this in humility and love. Jesus came to our world to absolve us of our sins. God accepts us, who we are sinners, the way we are.

The state of Indonesia consists of five big islands and hundreds of smaller ones. The Indonesian people have a diversity of cultures, ethnic groups and religions. The variety of geographical position of the islands brings along a variety of soil fertility. There are very fertile regions but some are barren. Different soil conditions bring about different economic situations of the people. Life in diversity is part of Indonesian life. In this existing diversity conflicts can arise, especially with regard to religions. In the years 2006 to 2008, we observed this in Ambon and Poso.

In my opinion we should see the positive points in the many cultural differences which the Indonesian people experience. Each region is unique and diversity might be experienced as wealth of the Indonesian people which can be explored by the next generation. Unity through diversity can be wonderful if we give to and take from each other equally.

Questions for the group:
- How do you experience differences in opinion, culture and religion?
- Where do they enrich you and where do they challenge you?
- Which hindrances do you know of which make it difficult to live together as people having different opinions, culture or religion?
- people having different opinions, culture or religion?
- What do you think would help to prevent tensions from becoming a conflict?
2. Kings 7:3-11 | God acts through the outcast

Four leprous men suffered want in front of the castle’s gate. At that time in Israel lepers were thought to be impure and thus were supposed to be excluded from the community (Lev. 13: 45-46).

The four lepers were ‘outside’ of the city in many respects. They were rejected and segregated due to their illness. They had become marginalized people who could not find shelter even in this life threatening situation due to the times of war. One of them did not want to give up in his struggle for life. He saw two different options for them; either return to the city or to the hostile army with the outcome unknown.

Why did they not want to return to the city? They felt that the city of Samaria was like their “barred past” due to its cultural and social system, not a real possibility. At the same time the city suffered from a bad famine, i.e. once again a hopeless option without real perspectives.

The second option, going to the hostile army, might possibly mean having a future, although it was a leap in the dark. There was the risk of being killed by the enemies. Nevertheless, they tried to seize the remotest chance: “…if they save us alive, we shall live; and if they kill us, we shall but die.” (2. Kings 7: 4).

This is not a word of indifference, quite the contrary, it is a word of hope, namely the hope for a life with a future. Giving up hope almost means being fated to die. But everybody who has hope, no matter what size or age, sets out and is no longer caught in the past or in a hopeless present. Such a person is ready to put up, to move and welcome the future. And he or she can experience that the God of Life always comes towards us.

When the four lepers came to the camp of the Aramaeans, they were surprised that the hostile army had vanished and the life threatening situation had been averted. God encourages us to resist the life destroying powers and to set out for the way to life. Thus, God can work through his spirit in all people yearning for life. And the God of Life meets them on the way – on their way – and leads them to a life of fullness. The day of God’s salvation is near!

After having experienced God’s rescue they feel the responsibility of bringing the Samarians this good news (2. Kings 7: 9). That was their mission which they had to fulfil (compare 1. Kor. 9:16). Thus, they went back to Samaria and reported that the hostile army had vanished. With the treasures found in the hostile camp the Samarians could overcome the hunger crisis. They experienced God’s intervention through those people they formerly had excluded and forced to the margins. The outcasts showed solidarity with the city’s inhabitants during the famine. They literally shared the good news with them. God had helped the outcasts and encouraged them to take a risk. After this, they felt as though they were commissioned to bring the good news to the world.

Questions for the group:
- Who are the people in your context who live at the margins or even outside the society as the four leprous men did?
- What can we learn from those who constantly have to struggle for a life in dignity?
- How can we practice solidarity with them? In which way can your partner group support you?

Luke describes the profound changes which take place on the way to Emmaus: First of all, we see the “inner” way of the two disciples: from grief, disappointment and resignation towards a new faith and new hope. Almost verse by verse, this can be retraced in the disciples’ walking, thinking and feeling. Later the disciples change direction also “externally”. All this is happening on their way. This experience of raising hopes cannot be made without starting the way again. Without a change of location a change of perspective is difficult. Thus, it is not by chance that the story leads from the centre (Jerusalem) to the margin (Emmaus) and back again.

Four parts of the way to become visible:

Walking together:
Jesus encounters the disciples as pastoral companion who helps them to speak about what they are suffering from. What is remarkable: The disciples pour out their grief to a stranger who listens and who walks with them. First steps of pastoral but also of missionary action are: listening, coming to know and to understand the situation of people. “Walking together” and “Living together” means sharing the gospel.

New interpretation:
Then the “stranger” explains the Holy Scriptures and opens up a new possibility of interpretation for their situation. This is also an encouragement to read the Bible “through the eyes of another” and to get involved with new perspectives.

Hospitality:
In the end, the two disciples offer hospitality to the stranger and he himself becomes their host. When he shares the bread with them, their eyes are opened. Jesus is experienced as the one who brings “fullness”, not only with his words but also with his deeds. This scene also reminds us of the “culture of hospitality” which even today is a high virtue in many countries. Hospitality is often experienced where people do not have much to share, such as during a visit to an Indonesian village or to refugees who are seeking asylum.

Sending:
During the joint meal the disciples realize: “The Lord has risen indeed.” What they experienced becomes only relevant when they themselves “stand up”, turn back and pass on the message – together with those who had their own “Easter experiences” in the meantime. The disciples no longer devalue these experiences, they do not regard them as competition but as a confirmation. The new encounter in Jerusalem is a beautiful picture of “reconciled diversity” through the witness of the one gospel.

Questions for the group:
- Relocation: Luke 24 is the story of a way which connects symbolically places “at the margins” and “in the centre”. In your context, who is standing “in the centre” and who is “at the margins”? Which message do people have standing at the margins from our perspective? Which ways help people to come together?
- With all senses: Speaking out and listening, tasting and seeing, feeling one’s own heart, praying and praising God: These words are characteristic of Luke 24. The text invites to narrate and to experience with all senses in which way God works among us while “we are on our ways”: Thus the text is an inspiration to “holistic mission”. How can the liberating message of the gospel be experienced “with all senses”? Report to your partner group about examples from your context.
- Hospitality: Which role does hospitality play in your culture? Which in your church services? Which lived experience changed you as a host/hostess or as a guest? Why not celebrate a “service of hospitality” with each other?
Matthew 15 | She went to far lengths – and could expand her borders

Jesus had withdrawn from the crowd. Perhaps he needed to rest? He went to a region where people did not know him and where he could hope to be undisturbed; where he did not expect to come across any “lost sheep of Israel”. At that time his understanding of mission was much narrower. He felt not yet called to the people beyond the borders of Israel.

A completely different view has the Canaanite woman, an indigenous woman. Worried deeply about her sick daughter she is prepared to go quite a way in search of help – and well beyond her normal borders.

She does not only over-step the mark in terms of courtesy: in broad daylight she disturbs the group surrounding Jesus. She becomes a “public nuisance”, comes nearer to Jesus, clamours for help. She acknowledges him publicly as next in line to King David in her neighbouring country. She trusts his spiritual healing power which could also heal her and her daughter, both “strangers belonging to another religion”.

But Jesus remains silent. Why? The disciples, men and women, urge him to help her – but in the first instance so that things calm down again (“for she keeps shouting after us.”). There was a time when the young Jesus movement had to grapple with the question as to whether the “Good News” would also be valid for those beyond geographic and religious borders. Would Jesus be responsible for “the others”, too? A question which was urgent at that time. A learning process had started for the young Jesus movement who put Jesus at the centre as a transformation point.

In the Gospel of Matthew as well as in the Gospel of Luke a woman contributes to this “transformation” of Jesus’ horizon: a woman, nameless for the readers, who did not count before the courts, who was not taken seriously even by Jesus at the beginning, who was not even seen as a human being but was called a dog.

Do we know this Jesus profile from our Bible reading? His rejecting and hurting attitude must disturb our familiar image of Jesus.

In the next scene we experience Jesus as a person who listened and who then dared to change his perspective. Jesus is moved by a woman from the margins towards new thinking. In 2013, the World Council of Churches formulated “Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes”: Mission also takes place at the edges, learning from those at the margins.

The nameless woman refuses to accept Jesus’ rejection. In full concentration, she continues to converse with Jesus strengthening her case more and more. No, she does not accept to be put off. She is satisfied with the crumbs falling from the table, for she is convinced that these have enough healing power for her and for her daughter. She simply says: “Yes, Lord, yet even….”

One sees in Jesus a change of perspective: Jesus pauses, allows the woman to finish putting forward her case – and becomes aware of a completely different dimension in the calm resistance of the woman. He recognizes her deep trust as the driver for her persistence. Jesus no longer sees her as a nuisance or as a person going too far or as someone who acted wrongfully, but rather he sees her now as a woman of remarkable faith.

Now it is clear: Jesus was not only sent to the sheep of the house of Israel. Borders were opened well beyond Israel.

Questions for the group:
- “Describe what it is like in your culture to “ask for something”.
- What do the terms “crumbs” and “dog” mean in your context (or everyday life)?
- What could be a sign or gesture of solidarity?
- Do you know people in your church/country who persistently advocate for “those at the margins”? 
Some suggestions for creative action in the groups

Here you find some suggestions for creative action during your Bible group meetings. These suggestions might open the way for creative alternatives how to experience Bible texts beyond listening and talking.

Isaiah 2

Diverse peace campaigns use the motif of „swords into plowshares“:

- Peace makers in Ghana, peace movement in Eastern Germany before the Fall of the Wall ...
- Which are adequate training possibilities in Ghana, which in Germany and Korea ...? How can young people become peace makers?
- Exercise how to intervene in a concrete case of conflict and reflect on it afterwards. Two young people are coming to blow (protected for example by boxing gloves to avoid severe injuries). Two persons must intervene. The rest shout encouragement to both sides in turns. Afterwards the participants reflect on their feelings and on the dynamic of the situation.

Internet:
Ghana: Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation:


Mark 9

Try with your group to enact a scene of “not letting go of power”. Use the method of „frozen pictures“ which was developed by the pedagogues/educationalist Boal/Paulo Freire.

Why don’t you test diverse seating arrangements during one of your meetings?

- sitting in a circle
- sitting behind each other in rows and one person in front is talking in monologues. Or during another meeting you are sitting on different kinds of chairs (high or small ones, some people may sit on the floor …)
- important: reflecting and exchanging afterwards which impact did the different places have on the well-being of the person and how the others perceived those sitting „on the floor“.

Philippians 2

Have an exchange and find out how to discover variety in your culture and the culture of your partner group.

- Can you create a joint work of art expressing harmony, reconciliation of differences? Materials: sand-flowers-on the floor (idea from India), pieces of cloth newly arranged and joined by sewing them together (idea from Central America).
- Big piece of cloth printed with your coloured hands … (idea from Brazil)
- Glass painting, painting a „church window“ (idea from Germany)
- Create a rainbow with colourful things from your room, your surrounding.

PLEASE take a photo and send it to your partner group and EMS Secretariat to be published on our Website!
2. Kings 7
Stage a role play in two or three scenes of the story of „The outcast and the rescued”.

- First place: outside of the city walls, four leprous men suffer want.
- Second place: within the city walls, people suffer from hunger and are afraid of the military.
- Third place: hostile camp comes into sight.

Luke 24
Please discuss what “margin” means and what “centre” means for you. The “definition” also depends on one’s own perspective. The following questions can help: “Who has a voice and is listened to?” “Who is not listened to?”

Organize a church service in your congregation on the topic of „hospitality“ and include people who rarely come to the services in your preparation.

Organize an evening „to be on the way” and try to unfold aspects of the Bible text at different places, for example low point Jerusalem – walking with a stranger – having a joint meal Consider having a meal at the end with another group.

Matthew 15
Invent, develop, create a role play on meeting Jesus. For example, a Syrian, a Romanies or Dalit woman could take over the role of the Canaanite woman.