

TOGETHER

MIDDLE SCHOOL SMALL GROUP GUIDE

Session 3

Session Topic: How Do I Study the Bible?

Session Overview: Reading the Bible is one of the best ways to know God.

- During the past few sessions, we've talked about the book of all books – the Bible. Each week, we've answered a question you might have about the Bible. In session 1, we asked, “How is the Bible put together?”
- Last session, we asked, “Why Should I Read the Bible?” We learned that reading the Bible is important for many reasons, including that the Bible is good for directing, correcting, and training us AND that it helps us know God and His love so that we can build a relationship with Him.
- So, you might be saying, “The Bible is important, it's useful, and it's one giant adventure story, but I don't even know how to read it. It's huge! Where do I start?” Well, we'll answer that because our question for today is: “How Do I Study the Bible?”
- I think we've established that the Bible isn't just some ordinary book, so we shouldn't treat it as if it's an ordinary book. You aren't going to use something like the Harry Potter book series to guide you through life. I hope not, anyway! The Bible is meant to be studied and understood. In **Joshua 1:8**, God teaches Joshua about the Book of Law – which was the only part of the Bible they had at that time.

Read Joshua 1:8

After reading it in your Bible, you can read this version (NIV) too:

"Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful."

Reflect and Discuss: What does this verse mean? What does the word meditate mean? What should we meditate on? What do you think "meditate on it day and night" means?

- We know that reading the Bible is important, but how can we study it? Let's look at three easy steps that will help us study the Bible:

3 Easy Steps to Studying the Bible

- Step #1 is to **read it**. I know this step is pretty obvious, but you have to read through it (and not just one verse) to understand it.
- Step #2 is to **understand it**. If you read something and then have no idea what it is saying, then it's not going to do you any good. It's like if you read a college-level science book right now. Most of us probably wouldn't understand a thing. What's the point of reading it then?
- Step #3 is to **apply it**. Even if you read it and understand it, it does you no good if you don't apply it to your life.
- So first up, step #1: **Read it**. You can read passages from your physical Bible, on the Bible app on your phone, and more. The Bible has been written in more languages than any other book in history, including hundreds of versions in English. All of this is to make it easier for you to read it.

- But how often do we actually read it? Think about it... how many times in the last month have you picked up your Bible and read it? Maybe you read your Bible every day, or maybe you haven't picked up a Bible in years. I don't ask this question to make you feel bad or embarrassed if you don't read the Bible. Sometimes we just forget and don't realize that we are not doing something until someone asks us if we are.
- Let's look at what **Proverbs 4:20-22** says about studying the Bible.

Read Proverbs 4:20-22

Reflect and Discuss: What "words" are these verses referring to? Whose "words" are we supposed to pay attention to?

- Now, of course everyone is so busy already with school, homework, sports, playing video games, and hanging out with friends. But when are we going to find time to read the Bible? A lot of adults struggle with taking time to read the Bible, too.
- It can be hard, but if we value getting to know God and growing more and more like Jesus, then we simply must find some time in our day to read the Bible. Even just a few minutes in the morning or before we fall asleep is a great start. So, step #1 is to **Read the Bible**.

Reflect and Discuss:

1. What is something you can do to help make reading the Bible a habit? Is there something you can do to remind yourself to read the Bible?
 - Step #2 is to **understand the Bible**. Understanding the Bible can seem a little bit difficult, can't it? I mean, how do you understand

something written so long ago that often doesn't seem to make sense for your life today?

- Have you ever walked into a room where someone has already started a movie? If you sit down and just start watching, it can be really hard to understand what is going on in the storyline because you missed the beginning of the movie.
- This can be the same in the Bible. If we just open it up and start reading a random part, we might find ourselves reading a crazy passage like Job 19:20, which says, “My breath is offensive to my wife; I am loathsome to my own family.” How can we possibly understand that? It sounds pretty sad and strange.
- To understand what certain passages mean, we must understand the context in which it was written. Context means the parts before and after a word or passage. These parts that come before and after what you're reading will clarify the meaning of the specific section you're reading. It can also include things like the time, place, or purpose of the passage.
- If we just read a random verse from the Bible, we could interpret it in several different ways. But to truly understand what it is that God wants to communicate to us, we need to look at the context surrounding the verse. Let's talk about that verse in Job again.
- What are some ways that we can find context to better understand this verse? We could learn more about Job, his wife, where he was, what he was doing when he wrote this, what was happening in Job's life, and what other ways he used the word offensive or loathsome. It might take me a while to figure all that out, but if I knew all that, I would understand that specific verse better

because, on its own, it's just confusing. The more we can understand the context, the more we can understand the verse.

- One thing that's so cool about understanding the Bible is that we are never alone when we are reading it. Unlike any other book you read, when you read the Bible, the Holy Spirit is there to help you understand what you are reading. The Holy Spirit can guide you and show you the meaning of what you're reading so that you can understand it more. And that's something you will never get when reading a Harry Potter book. A great prayer to say before you read the Bible is "Come, Holy Spirit." Plus, the more we practice studying the Bible, the easier it will get.
- Alright, moving on to Step #3 – **apply it**.

Reflect and Discuss: What does "applying Scripture to your life" mean?

- What good does it do if we read the Bible and understand it, but then we don't ever apply it to our lives?

Read James 1:22-25

- Here is another translation of James 1:22-25: "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do."

Reflect and Discuss:

1. What does it mean to be "doers" of the Word and not just "hearers" of the Word?

2. Why does this verse talk about looking into a mirror? What does that have to do with applying Scripture to our lives?
3. What do you think God is trying to tell us in this passage?
 - So we can't just read the Bible and understand it. We must also follow its guidance and instructions for living the BEST life possible. He gave us His words in the form of the Bible to help us get to know Him and His great plans for our future. But we must take what we read and understand in the Bible and use it in our lives.
 - Have you ever made chocolate chip cookies before? You must read the recipe and understand the ingredients, instructions, and baking requirements to make them. What if you read and understood that the recipe called for 2 cups of sugar but you decided to add 2 cups of salt instead? Those would be some disgusting cookies. The same goes for the Bible.
 - If we read and understand instructions from the Bible but completely ignore those instructions, we will get some bad results. It's important to read, understand, AND apply. All three.
 - Can you believe that we've come to the end of this series on the Bible? I hope you have learned a little more about the Bible and God's love for you during these few sessions.

Reflect and Discuss:

1. Have you ever thought about the Bible as a recipe for life?
2. Do you think it's important for you personally to read the Bible instead of just hearing it read at church on the weekends? Why or why not?

3. Is it enough to read your Bible just during Disciple Formation sessions or do you think that reading the Bible outside of church is a good idea? Explain your reasoning.
4. What struggles have you come across while reading, understanding, or applying Scripture? What things make it hard to read the Bible on your own outside of church?
5. What are some tools that you can use to help you understand what you're reading? (Examples: Asking leaders at church, friends, and family, the "Study Aids" section in your Bible, commentaries, the Bible app, Bible studies, the BibleProject™ videos on YouTube, and MORE!]

- Now let's explore some of the helpful features in our own Bibles.

Look/read through the introduction to the Catholic Youth Bible (pages 2-3, 6-11, and 14).

You don't have to completely read through these pages. Just become familiar with the content on the pages. Be sure to look at the difference between and the function of the obelisk and the asterisk (see explanation on page 14 of the Catholic Youth Bible).

Then look over pages 18-20. The CYB (Catholic Youth Bible) gives background information and other helpful information about the section and the book at the beginning of each book of the Bible.

- Now that we've *talked* about reading the Bible, understanding the Bible, and applying the Bible to our lives, it's time to try it for ourselves! As we discussed earlier, sometimes sitting down and reading the Bible can be stressful because we don't know where to start or don't understand what we read. We are going to learn how to use the SOAP method to help us study the Bible.

Try the SOAP method with **Luke 6:27-31**.

SOAP Method of Studying Scripture

Step 1: S - Scripture

After reading through the passage out loud, reread it quietly and then write down what part of the passage stuck out to you. Allow 1-2 minutes for this step.

Step 2: O - Observation

Now ask yourself why those parts of the passage stuck out to you. What is the meaning of those words? Why are they important? Were there any commands, promises, or instructions?

Step 3: A - Application

Ask yourself how you can apply this verse to your life. Can you form a new habit or make a change? What did you learn from this passage?

Step 4: P - Prayer

Allow 1-2 minutes of silence to pray about what you read and reflected upon.

If you're interested in learning more about the SOAP method, watch this video: www.youtube.com/watch?v=psJ1XR4T6Co

Session Challenges

- Bible verse to memorize - **James 1:22**: "Be doers of the word and not hearers only, deluding yourselves."
- Now for our challenge of the week... This week, choose one Scripture passage to try the SOAP method with and let your group know how it goes next week! We recommend picking a small part of the Gospel of Matthew or the Gospel of John. We encourage you to ask a parent, sibling, or friend to do this activity with you.

You get a bonus point for this challenge if you can find somebody to complete it with you. If you did SOAP as part of this lesson, that counts! :)