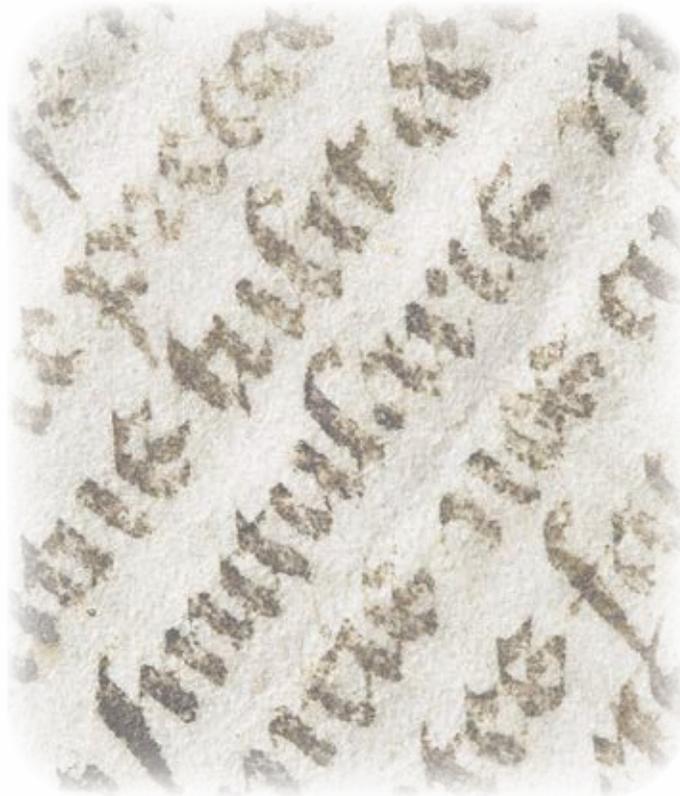


Session 3



THE BIBLE



SYMBOLON
THE CATHOLIC FAITH EXPLAINED

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THE BIBLE:

God's Love Letter to Humanity



LEADER PREPARATION OVERVIEW

Most people know what a Bible is, even if they have never read a word of it. If you ask them what it contains, they probably will say that it is full of a lot of rules and moral teaching, and maybe some stories they learned as children, like Adam and Eve and Noah's Ark.

But the Bible is much more than that. The Bible is God's love letter to humanity.

In the Sacred Scriptures, our Father in Heaven reaches out to lovingly talk to his children. Through the words of the Bible, God speaks to us in a deeply personal and intimate way. Within its 73 books, the Bible outlines God's plan for salvation, starting with Creation, moving through his interaction with his Chosen People Israel, and finally culminating with the story of how his Son, Jesus, entered into time and put a human face on the Divine.

As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains, in the Bible "God speaks to man in a human way" (CCC 109) through the work of human authors under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. In the words of Sacred Scripture, God wants to guide our daily lives, so that we can come to know and love him on earth and be with him in Heaven for eternity.

THIS SESSION WILL COVER:

- **The Bible as God's loving communication with each of us**
- **What we mean when we say the Bible is inspired by the Holy Spirit**
- **The Catholic approach to interpreting Scripture correctly**
- **How the Church discerns which books are part of the Bible (the canon of Scripture)**
- **How we can know with confidence that the Bible contains God's revelation for our lives**
- **How to start studying the Bible and praying with God's Word**

STEP # 1

OPENING PRAYER



SAY: Welcome to our session on Sacred Scripture.

Have participants turn to page 23 of their Guide to find the Opening Prayer and discussion questions.

This week we are going to talk about God's love letter to humanity—the Bible—and how God reaches out to us and seeks to initiate a conversation with us. When you think about it, it's astonishing that God wants to lovingly talk with each of us about our lives. But before we get into how this happens, let us begin by saying together the prayer of St. John Chrysostom before reading Sacred Scripture.



O Lord Jesus Christ,
 open the eyes of my heart,
 that I may hear your word
 and understand and do your will,
 for I am a sojourner upon the earth.
 Hide not your commandments from me,
 but open my eyes, that I may perceive the wonders of your law.
 Speak unto me the hidden and secret things of your wisdom.
 On you do I set my hope, O my God,
 that you shall enlighten
 my mind and understanding
 with the light of your knowledge,
 not only to cherish those things
 which are written, but to do them;
 that in reading the lives and sayings
 of the saints I may not sin,
 but that such may serve for my restoration,
 enlightenment and sanctification,
 for the salvation of my soul,
 and the inheritance of life everlasting.
 For you are the enlightenment of those
 who lie in darkness,
 and from you comes every good deed
 and every gift. Amen.

CELEBRATION OF THE WORD OF GOD

(Optional)

**Suggested Scripture readings for a
Celebration of the Word of God**

(see Introduction to the Leader's Guide)

2 Timothy 3:14–17

Deuteronomy 11:18–23

Psalms 119:105

Joshua 1:8

STEP #2

INTRODUCTION

SAY: What do you think of when you hear the word “Bible”? A big book that was written thousands of years ago? A set of rules and regulations? Stories like Adam and Eve or Noah’s Ark?

Or do you think of the Bible as one of the ways God communicates his will and gives us guidance for our daily lives? That’s how we, as Christians, are supposed to view Sacred Scripture. In fact, as one of the presenters in this week’s video segment says, the word “Bible” might be thought of as an abbreviation for “Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth.”



Because the Bible is so important to our lives, in this session we are going to learn:

- The Bible as God’s loving communication with each of us
- What we mean when we say the Bible is inspired by the Holy Spirit
- The Catholic approach to interpreting Scripture correctly
- How the Church discerns which books are part of the Bible (the canon of Scripture)
- How we can know with confidence that the Bible contains God’s revelation for our lives
- How to start studying the Bible and praying with God’s Word

We will start by watching a short video.

STEP #3

VIDEO PART I: GOD’S INSPIRED WORD



Play video Part I, which will play for approximately 10 minutes.

STEP #4

PROCLAMATION

After the video has stopped,



SAY: We have just heard how the Bible is different from any other book ever written. Every other religious book is the story of man's search for God, but the Bible is the only sacred book that is God's revelation to us. It alone is inspired by God, who breathed forth his Divine Word through the words of the human authors. In the Bible, God himself speaks to us and reveals who he is, and what his plan is for humanity.

In order to reveal himself to us, God communicates in a human way through Sacred Scripture, which contains the words of God expressed in the words of men. God is the author of Sacred Scripture. He inspired human writers to compose the sacred books and gives assurance that they teach his saving truth without error. There are 46 books of the Old Testament and 27 books of the New Testament, which together tell one story of God's plan of salvation in Jesus Christ. In order to interpret Scripture correctly, we must pay attention to what God wants to reveal through the sacred writers. The Catholic Church has always considered Sacred Scripture, along with Sacred Tradition, as part of God's Divine Revelation (CCC 96–100, 134–141).

STEP #5

VIDEO PART II: GOD'S COMMUNICATION WITH US



SAY: In our second video segment, we will hear how we come to know and understand how the Catholic Church discerned which books to include in the Bible, how we interpret Sacred Scripture, and what the Bible should mean in our lives.



Play video Part II, which will play for approximately 22 minutes.



DIGGING DEEPER

The Importance of the Holy Spirit in Scripture

“The Bible, an instrument ‘by which God speaks every day to the faithful’ (Ep. 133, 13), thus becomes a stimulus and source of Christian life for all situations and for each person... Through meditation on and knowledge of the Scriptures, one ‘maintains the equilibrium of the soul’ (Ad Eph., Prol.). Only a profound spirit of prayer and the Holy Spirit’s help can introduce us to understanding the Bible: ‘In the interpretation of Sacred Scripture we always need the help of the Holy Spirit.’”

—Benedict XVI, General Audience, 14 November 2007

STEP # 6 BREAK

After the video is finished,

SAY: Now let's take a short break. When we come back, we are going to discuss some of the things we learned in this last video segment.

Break should be about 10 minutes.



STEP # 7 DISCUSSION

Have participants refer to their Guide to find these questions.

SAY: Welcome back to our session on the Bible. Let's talk a little about what we learned in the last video segment.

DISCUSSION QUESTION #1

Why is it true that “ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ”?

(The Bible is God's revelation to mankind—it is a compilation of God's interaction with mankind throughout history. God has been trying to teach us about himself throughout human history. If we don't understand the Scriptures, we don't understand the truths about God that he has been trying to teach us.)



DIGGING DEEPER

Sola Scriptura

Most Protestant denominations adhere to *sola scriptura*, which means “scripture alone.” This is the mistaken doctrine that the Bible, outside of any other tradition or authority, contains all that is necessary for salvation and holiness. According to this view, which was made popular in the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century, the Church cannot teach through Sacred Tradition, but only through Scripture. But Jesus, the Apostles, and the early Christian Church never intended the Bible to be read in this way. The Scriptures always were meant to be read in light of tradition (2 Thes. 2:15) and the teaching authority Jesus gave his Church (see Matt. 10:1, 7-8, 40; Matt. 16:13-19). *Sola scriptura* is considered one of the founding principles of the Protestant Reformation.

DISCUSSION QUESTION #2

According to the video, what does it mean that Catholics don't interpret the Bible in a literalistic way, but they do read the Bible literarily? What examples does the presenter give?

(The Catholic approach to Scripture is different from the fundamentalist view, which reads Scripture in a literalistic way. To discern the truth God put in Scripture, we must interpret the Bible literarily, remembering that God speaks to us in a human way, through the human writers of Scripture. That means that we examine the context and intent of the author for any given passage. For example, when the author of the Song of Solomon stated, "You are beautiful; your eyes are doves," he did not intend for the reader to think his beloved literally had doves in her eyes, but that her eyes were as captivating as doves (Song of Solomon 1:15). However, when the writer intended to convey historical truth, such as reporting that Jesus's tomb was empty, indicating the reality of the Resurrection, we interpret those passages as literal fact. As the Catechism explains, to interpret the Bible correctly, one must consider the historical context, the culture, the literary genres, and the modes of expression and narratives common to the biblical writers' time (CCC 109-110). When we interpret the Bible correctly, considering the human writer's intention and what the Holy Spirit wishes to reveal through the human writer, we will come to know the truth God reveals in Scripture.)

DISCUSSION QUESTION #3

Let's say a friend of yours, while speaking about a passage she was reading in the Bible, states, "It was like God was speaking directly to me—directly into a situation in my life—when I read the passage." How is this possible?

(The Bible is a compilation of testimonies and records of God speaking throughout history. God is without time; his words are not in the past, but rather they speak through time. Reading the stories of God's revelation to mankind is a great way to allow God to use his words to speak into our lives.)

STEP # 8 (OPTIONAL) SUMMARY & EXHORTATION

At this point, the facilitator, small group leader, or catechist has the option to give a summary of the main points that have been presented in the video segments. Here are some key points you may want to cover.

- Sacred Scripture contains the Word of God in the words of man (CCC 101).
- God is the author of the Sacred Scriptures. He inspired human writers who wrote as true authors, using their own language, style, and powers. But God worked in them and by them so that they consigned to writing “whatever he wanted written, and no more” (CCC 105-106).
- Because God is the divine author and everything affirmed by the human writers is affirmed by the Holy Spirit, the Scriptures always teach the truth (CCC 107).
- The Bible is not to be read in a literalistic way, but literarily, with attention to what the human writers intend to affirm and to what God wants to reveal through them (CCC 108-114).
- All Scripture tells a single story—the story of salvation that culminates in Jesus. The Old Testament prepares for the New, and the New Testament fulfills the Old (CCC 101-102, 122, 128-129).
- The Catholic Church, under the guidance of the Spirit, has discerned which books are included in the list (or canon) of authentic Scriptures (CCC 120).
- The Church has always seen the Scriptures as essential to nourish and govern Christian lives (CCC 131).

STEP #9

CALL TO CONVERSION



SAY: Spend a few moments in prayer asking Jesus to help you learn to love Sacred Scripture and use it on your journey of faith. Use your Participant's Guide to write down your thoughts and reflections on the following questions:

1. Psalm 119:105 says, "Your word is a lamp to my feet, a light for my path." What does this passage mean to me? Am I willing to read God's Word in Scripture with an open heart and mind, expecting that God will give me insights for my life?
2. What can I do this week to make the reading of Scripture a greater part of my life? (Consider reading the Bible, perhaps starting with the Gospel of Luke as suggested in the video.)
3. Reflect on the following quote from Pope St. Gregory found in your Guide about the role of Scripture as we grow in faith:

"The Holy Bible is like a mirror before our mind's eye. In it we see our inner face. From the Scriptures we can learn our spiritual deformities and beauties. And there too we discover the progress we are making and how far we are from perfection."

How might thinking of the Bible as a mirror and as a way to learn about my spiritual progress make a difference in how I listen to the readings at Mass? What can I do to be better prepared for the Scripture readings each week?

STEP # 10

CLOSING PRAYER



SAY: I hope you take time this week to reflect on what we learned about the Bible.

Let's close our time together today by praying.

A Prayer Before Reading Scripture

We praise and thank you
glorious Lord Jesus Christ,
for being present among us
and in us.

In us you praise the Father
with the voice of the Spirit,
whom you have given us.
Lord, may this voice of the Spirit
be roused in us as we listen to the words
of Scripture in a manner
that is worthy and fitting,
appropriate to the meaning
of the text and in harmony

with what is revealed to us.
Make us ready to recognize
how we can correspond
to the teaching and example
proposed to us, for you are God,
living and reigning
for ever and ever. Amen.

—Carlo Maria Martini, SJ



FOR FURTHER READING:

For more in-depth reading about Sacred Scripture, see the following *Catechism* passages:

Christ as the Word of God: CCC 101–104

Inspiration and the truth of Scripture: CCC 105–108

The Holy Spirit and Sacred Scripture: CCC 109–119

Books of the Old Testament: CCC 120–123

The New Testament canon: CCC 124–127

Scripture and the Church: CCC 131–133

If you don't have an approved Catholic translation of the Bible, such as the New American Bible or the Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition, in your home, obtain one or find online at www.ignatius.com

OTHER RESOURCES:

United States Catholic Catechism for Adults, Chapters 3

A Father Who Keeps His Promises: God's Covenant Love in Scripture by Scott Hahn

Walking with God: A Journey through the Bible by Tim Gray and Jeff Cavins

Catholic Bible Dictionary by Scott Hahn

Where is THAT in the Bible? by Patrick Madrid

The Bible Compass: A Catholic's Guide to Navigating the Scriptures by Dr. Edward Sri

The Ignatius Catholic Study Bible series by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch

