

The Bible: Power and Promise



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The logo for Horizons, featuring a stylized 'H' and the word 'Horizons' in a serif font, with a purple brushstroke underneath. Below the logo is the text 'A Senior High Parish Religion Program'.

A Senior High Parish Religion Program

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Contents

To the many people who have been God's living word in my life:

- my wife, Betty, and my wonderful sons, Tim and Peter
- my parents, Mick and Trudy, my sister, Dina, my brother, Lance, and their families
- the many members of the Singer family who have welcomed me as son and brother
- the ministry community of the Diocese of Lansing, colleagues and friends for fifteen years



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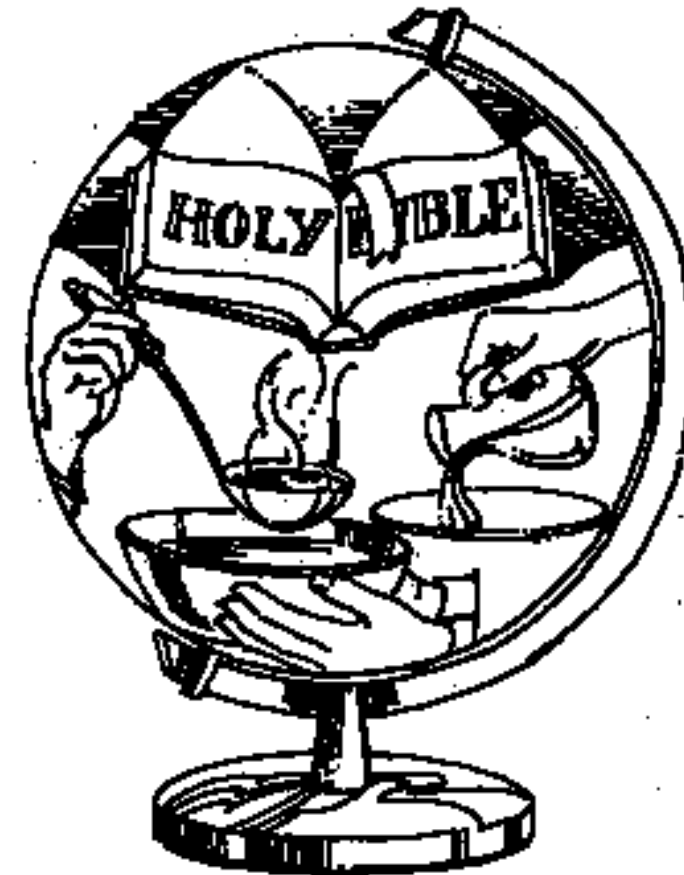
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Introduction



An Overview of This Course

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work. (2 Tim. 3:14–17)

This passage from the Christian Scriptures is addressed to Timothy, a young Christian leader. He is encouraged to use the Scriptures as a basis for his

ministry. The author tells Timothy that the Scriptures can be used for teaching (catechesis), for reproof and correction (living morally), and for training in righteousness (growing spiritually). Does this sound like a solid agenda for youth ministry?

The need to build a life based on the Scriptures is just as important for young people today as it was for people during the time Second Timothy was written. God's revelation in the Scriptures provides answers to life's crucial questions. And just like Timothy, our young people must have the opportunity to explore the Scriptures within a believing community. For many people—including the writer of this course—reading the Bible and discussing it with others has led to a deeper understanding of and commitment to Jesus and his message.

There is great irony in our use of the Bible today. On the one hand, we live in a culture that has been deeply influenced by the Judeo-Christian heritage. We see this influence on our currency, in the motto “In God we trust”; on signs saying “John 3:16” held up by fans at our sporting events; in our popular morality, which has embraced teachings like “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you”; and in our major public celebrations, such as graduations, weddings, and funerals.

On the other hand, despite this cultural familiarity with biblical passages and themes, ignorance about the Bible abounds. Many young people cannot name the four Gospels; and many Christians believe that the world was literally created in six days—an interpretation not supported by the Catholic church’s understanding of biblical truth.

It may surprise some that a course focusing on the Bible is not offered until the third year of the Horizons Program. Many high school curriculums include such a course—usually on the Hebrew Scriptures—in the ninth grade. There are several reasons for the approach taken in Horizons. First, some basic Bible skills are introduced in the level 1 core course *Jesus: His Message and Mission*. Second, the Scriptures are an integral part of the entire Horizons Program and are used in every course. Finally, *The Bible: Power and Promise* introduces more sophisticated concepts about the Bible, ideas better appreciated by older adolescents.

This course is designed to provide a foundation for a solid Catholic understanding and interpretation of biblical revelation. It does not ask participants to examine a particular book of the Bible or a single biblical theme. Instead, it invites them to read and study passages from many books throughout the Bible. The Scripture minicourses in this level of the Horizons Program—*Encounters with Jesus in the Gospels* and *Paul: The Man and the Message*—offer the young people an opportunity to expand on what they learn in this core course.

The Bible: Power and Promise is intended to be taught as five 2-hour sessions presented one a week for five consecutive weeks. Extended breaks between the sessions might interrupt the flow of the course. The activities are structured for a group of ten to fifteen participants. If your group is considerably larger or smaller, you may have to make minor adjustments in the session plans. If you need assistance with this task, consult your program coordinator. Because the course was developed for older

high school students who freely choose to participate, it presumes that the young people will be cooperative and able to understand complex concepts.

The first session provides a basic introduction to the mechanics of using the collection of books we call the Bible. It gives a general overview of the parts of the Bible and a review of how to find passages in it. It allows the participants to explore how the Bible is made up of different literary forms and shows them that an understanding of those forms is needed if they hope to understand properly the authors’ messages.

The second session is devoted to two objectives. First, following an introductory staged event, it leads the young people through a five-step process that parallels the development of the Bible. Second, it presents a study on the story of the Garden of Eden, in the Book of Genesis, to explain more about myth as a literary form.

The heart of the third session is a simulation in which the young people travel the journey of the Hebrew people as told in the Hebrew Scriptures. The young people work in teams to lead activities at different stops in the simulation.

“Proclaiming Jesus! An Overview of the Christian Testament” is the title of the fourth session. The first half of the session includes activities and a presentation that review the content, development, and literary forms of the Christian Testament. The second half of the session calls the young people to study Bible passages that refer to the nature of the Messiah and to engage in an art project that reflects those passages.

The final session of *The Bible: Power and Promise* considers how we can make the Bible a regular part of our life. The session starts with an activity to identify the kind of truth the Bible provides for us. This leads into a brainstorming exercise, presentation, and discussion on how to make the Bible a regular part of our spiritual growth. The next activity asks the young people to study the Bible in order to identify biblical wisdom to apply to their life. To remind them to use the Bible as they continue in their faith journey, you present them with special bookmarks and candles.

Background for This Course

The Adolescent and This Course

Saint Thomas Aquinas believed that people should not begin to study theology until they are in their mid-thirties. He felt that people need that much life experience to grasp the subtleties and significance of theological study and inquiry. Also, it may be true, to some extent, that in-depth study of the Bible is an adult enterprise. The older people get, the more they can appreciate the all-too-human struggles of biblical characters, the sublime symbolism of certain biblical stories, and the awesome gift that is the person of Jesus Christ.

The young people taking this course are at the threshold of young adulthood. They are beginning to face, and will continue to face, the questions addressed in the Scriptures: Why is there pain and suffering? What is the purpose of human existence? What values should I embrace in my life? This course exposes them to the riches of the Bible’s wisdom for their life’s journey.

Some people will acknowledge the importance of the Bible’s wisdom but ask, Why should young people learn technical things about literary forms and stages in the development of the Bible? One reason is that young people may appreciate the Bible more if they realize that its development was a very human enterprise. Some people look at the biblical authors as mere puppets, through whom God dictated insights and information far beyond human comprehension. This viewpoint reveals a fundamental distrust of human nature. Mainline Christians, including Catholics, believe that the biblical authors “made full use of their own faculties and powers” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 106). This viewpoint affirms the fundamental goodness of the human person and suggests that God works through us because of our humanity, not in spite of it. This positive viewpoint is generally attractive to young people.

A second reason young people should learn how the Bible developed is to appreciate its intensely communal nature. Again, some believe that the Bible was written by solitary individuals almost magically inspired by God. Catholics believe that the biblical stories were first and foremost community stories, shared and preserved by believers orally long before they were written down. Eventually,

councils of bishops ratified the community of faith’s common usage and decided which books would be part of the authentic Christian Scriptures. To fully understand God’s message in the Bible, believers today must also encounter it as members of a community of faith, under the guidance of the successors of the Apostles. The Bible is not just a private phone line between the individual and God; it is a profound communal treasure. Young people, who tend to yearn deeply for belonging and group identity, can be fascinated by this dimension of the Bible’s development.

A third reason young people should learn the Bible’s literary forms and stages of development is that some Catholic Bible study resources presume that the user is familiar with these concepts. It is our hope that the young people in the Catholic church will read and study the Bible as they grow into adulthood. This course can prepare them to use other resources in their study of the Bible. By providing a solid explanation of the process by which the Bible developed, it can help the young people avoid a simplistic and individualistic approach to reading and interpreting the Bible.

The Theology of This Course

This course contains a great deal of theology and information on the Christian Scriptures. Concepts such as the various literary forms found in the Bible, biblical history, the five stages in the development of the Bible, and biblical truth are presented in detailed session plans. Read the session plans carefully to be sure you are familiar with and comfortable with the material in them.

A goal of this course is to teach what some call the contextualist approach to studying the Scriptures. This approach involves seeking to interpret the books and passages of the Bible by understanding them in their total context. The *Catechism* says, “In order to discover *the sacred authors’ intention*, the reader must take into account the conditions of their time and culture, the literary genres [forms] in use at that time, and the modes of feeling, speaking, and narrating then current” (no. 110). A misunderstanding of the context for a writing can lead to an inaccurate understanding of the intended message.

The contextualist approach can be contrasted to the fundamentalist approach, which views every book and passage in the Bible to be scientifically and historically true as stated. That is, fundamentalists ignore or downplay the literary context described above. This approach also promotes a highly privatized interpretation of biblical truth that does not adequately take into account the teaching of sacred Tradition. The fundamentalist approach to the Bible is widespread in our society today. But it is not the approach to understanding the Scriptures that is accepted and taught by the Catholic church, as the *Catechism* explains: “The Church, to whom the transmission and interpretation of Revelation is entrusted, ‘does not derive her certainty about all revealed truths from the holy Scriptures alone. Both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honored with equal sentiments of devotion and reverence’” (no. 82).

Further background on the contextualist approach is provided in the following article by Dr. Margaret Nutting Ralph, whose work was very helpful in the development of this course:

What Scripture Says . . . and Doesn't Say: Reading the Bible in Context (by Margaret Nutting Ralph)

Have you ever heard two people who totally disagree with each other use Scripture to “prove” that God is on their side? Instead of letting Scripture form their thinking, they use a quote from Scripture, often taken out of context, to support their own opinions.

We’ve probably all done this to some extent. Even expert theologians use Scripture quotes to show that their teaching is rooted in the Bible. But a proper understanding of biblical revelation will challenge us to examine our approach to Scripture and overcome any tendency to quote the Bible out of context.

Instead of asking, “Do these words support what I already think?” we need to ask, “What is this passage trying to teach me?” When we recognize what the inspired biblical authors intend to teach we are opening our minds and hearts to the revelation of Scripture.

The revealed Scriptures do not necessarily hold the same meaning we may want to attach to the words. The inspired biblical authors intended to say and teach certain truths, and we need to root our understanding of Scripture first and foremost in the intent of the author.

But how do we determine the intentions of an author who lived thousands of years ago in a totally different cultural setting? The Church teaches us that in order to understand the revelation the Bible contains we must learn first and foremost to read passages in the context in which they appear.

What are you reading? One way to safeguard against misunderstanding the intent of an author is to determine the kind of writing the author has chosen to use. Any piece of writing has a particular literary form: poetry, prose, fiction, essay, letter, historical account and so on. This is as true of the biblical books as of any piece of contemporary writing.

If we misunderstand an author’s literary form, we will misunderstand what the author intends to say. In order to understand what we are reading, then, we have to make allowances for the form and change our expectations accordingly.

We do this any time we read a newspaper, for example. As we turn the pages of a newspaper we encounter a variety of literary forms—news, features, editorials and so on—and we adjust our idea of what we can expect from the writing for each form.

For instance, after I read a news story I expect to have the answer to the question, “What happened?” I expect the author of a news story to be objective and evenhanded, to inform me of the facts. If the story is about something controversial, I expect the writer to cover all sides fairly.

When I get to the editorial page, I change my expectations. Now I know that the author is allowed to be persuasive rather than objective. I may find facts that support the author’s point of view but nothing that contradicts that point of view.

So if I read an editorial with the same frame of mind with which I read a front-page news story, thinking that the author has responded to the question, “What happened?” I will be misinformed after I finish my reading. It is not the author’s fault that I am misinformed. It is my own.

How the inspired author tells the tale. Now let’s look at how literary form functions in the Bible. One of the inspired biblical authors—the author of the Book of Job—has written in the form of a debate. This literary form demands that you be as persuasive as possible on both sides of an issue. If you write on the side you agree with persuasively and the side you disagree with poorly, you have not written a good debate.

The author of the Book of Job lived at a time when people believed that all suffering was punishment for sin. He wrote a debate to argue against this belief. The author places his debate in the context of a preexisting legend that establishes at the outset the fact that Job is innocent. So why is he suffering?

The author portrays Job’s friends arguing with Job over the cause of his suffering. All the friends think that Job must have sinned or he wouldn’t be suffering. They do not know, as does the audience, that Job’s sinfulness is not the source of his suffering. The friends are wrong.

Now, if you did not know that the Book of Job is a debate, in which some of the characters argue persuasively for the point of view with which the author disagrees, you might read an isolated passage and conclude that the book teaches the opposite of what the author intended to teach. You might think that the friends are teaching a valid message about suffering.

If we look at the book as a whole, we discover that the author places the truth he is teaching not on the lips of Job’s friends but on the lips of God. God appears at the end of the debate and responds to the friends’ arguments. Obviously the author agrees with what God has to say. God contradicts the belief that all suffering is punishment for sin.

Because this book is in the canon we know that it teaches revealed truth. We can only discover this revealed truth, however, if we look at the literary form of the book.

We need to remember, too, that the Bible is actually a “library” of many different books. To say that Job is a debate is not to say that the Bible as a whole is a debate or that a Gospel is a debate or that the Book of Revelation is a debate. The answer to the question, “What literary form am I reading?” will vary from book to book. Often the introduction to each book in a good study Bible will give you the relevant literary form.

Culture in context. We have seen how easy it is to “misquote” the Bible by taking passages out of the context of their literary form. A second context we need to consider is the culture and the beliefs in place when the book was written. The inspired author and the original audience shared knowledge, presumptions, expressions and concerns that may not be part of our awareness, but may nevertheless influence the meaning of the book or passage.

The inspired author may have applied the revealed message contained in a particular book to a shared cultural setting in order to make the message clearer. People sometimes mistake such applications for the heart of the revealed message. Thus they put the full authority of Scripture behind passages that reflect beliefs of the time rather than the unchanging truth the author intended to teach.

In expressing the revealed truth, a biblical author may show cultural biases and presumptions that later generations know are inaccurate. This kind of misunderstanding resulted in Galileo’s excommunication. We know, as biblical authors did not, that the earth is not the center of the universe or even our solar system. We also know that the Bible does not claim to teach astronomy. Rather, the Bible addresses questions about the relationship between God and God’s people, about what we should be doing to build up God’s kingdom rather than to tear it down.

A biblical author may also apply an eternal truth to a setting that is important to the original audience but not to us. For example, one of Paul’s key insights is that the way we treat every other person is the way we treat the risen Christ. He applies this insight to the social order of his own day, an order that included slavery. We misuse Scripture if we say this application shows that *God’s* social order includes slavery. While Paul’s core message is eternally true revelation, the application was relevant only in its own cultural context.

Revelation is ongoing. A third context we must be aware of is the place the inspired author’s insights have in the process of revelation. The Bible is not a book of bottom-line answers like a catechism.

The Bible is a “library of books” written over a two-thousand-year period. It reflects the process by which the inspired authors came to greater knowledge of God’s revealed truth. People who do not realize or do not believe that the Bible reflects this progression take an early insight as the whole truth.

For example, people may make this mistake when arguing over the death penalty. Some people who support the death penalty try to put God’s authority behind their opinion by quoting Scripture: “An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a life for a life.”

It is true that Scripture teaches this (see Exodus 21:23–24). However, the teaching dates to the time of the Exodus, about 1250 B.C.E. At the time this

teaching was an ethical step forward. It taught people not to seek escalating revenge: If you harm me, I can't do worse to you than you originally did to me.

Jesus later challenged people to grow beyond this teaching. He said, "You have heard that it was said, 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. . . .' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you . . ." (Matthew 5:38,44). Jesus did not say that the law was wrong, only that it did not go far enough. Jesus is the fulfillment of the law.

We are misusing Scripture if we quote Exodus to support the death penalty and fail to quote the words of Jesus in the Gospels. When we use a passage from Scripture to support our side of an argument, we must ask ourselves if the passage reflects the fullness of truth or whether it is a partial truth, perhaps an early insight.

Context, context, context. It is distressing to hear Christians abuse the Bible by quoting it in favor of un-Christian positions. It is doubly distressing to realize that we ourselves might be guilty of this.

One way to avoid this mistake is to remember always to consider the context. Determine the place of a passage in its larger context. Ask yourself what literary form the author is using. Explore the beliefs and presumptions the author may share with the original audience. Learn something about the time when the book was written. Know how the author's insights fit into the process of revelation.

If we do this, we will avoid many a harmful error. We will be less likely to abuse Scripture and more likely to hear the revelation of God's love that the biblical authors intend us to hear.

Finally, invite the Holy Spirit to open up your mind and heart as you listen to the word. Discerning God's will in your life will leave you with Christ's own peace in your heart.

Margaret Nutting Ralph is secretary for educational ministries for the Diocese of Lexington, Kentucky, and director of the master's degree programs for Roman Catholics at Lexington Theological Seminary. She has taught Scripture to high school students, college students, and adult education groups for twenty years. She is the author of the book and video "And God Said What?" and the Discovering the Living Word series (all from Paulist Press).

This Course and Evangelization

In *The Challenge of Catholic Youth Evangelization*, evangelization is described as "the initial effort by the faith community as a whole to proclaim through word and witness the Good News of the Gospel to those who have not yet heard or seen it, and then to invite those persons into a relationship with Jesus Christ and the community of believers" (National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry, p. 3). Evangelization is also the ongoing witness of the community of believers and, as such, the basis and energizing core of all the ministries in the church.

The Horizons Program is grounded in a commitment to evangelize young people effectively. Each course reflects that commitment in both content and methodology. All the courses, even those on topics that do not appear overtly "religious," explore the connection between the lived experience of the young person and Jesus' proclamation of the Good News. All the courses employ strategies that actively engage the whole person, demonstrating that religious education can be not only informative but life-giving and even fun! In other words the Horizons Program tries to be "good news" not just proclaim the Good News.

The sacred Scriptures are a primary tool of evangelization. A person who develops a thirst and an appreciation for the Scriptures is continually being evangelized. *The Bible: Power and Promise* aims to make the power of the Scriptures come alive in young people's lives. It tries to do this by providing interesting activities, correcting common misunderstandings, and outlining a process for reading and interpreting the Bible oneself.

However, when it comes to evangelization, a program is no substitute for a person. Your enthusiasm for the Scriptures and your willingness to share how they provide guidance in your life are important to your role as a catechist. As you prepare to teach the course, take some time to reflect on the meaning and effect of the Scriptures in your life. Be prepared to share that experience at appropriate times during the course, particularly in the many unanticipated "teachable moments" that are a treasured part of the teaching experience. Be open to the Spirit and let it lead you.

Teaching This Course

A Video Resource for Teachers

The information presented in this section identifies the elements requiring special consideration when leading *The Bible: Power and Promise*. The creators of Horizons developed an informative video to prepare teachers to lead any of the courses in the program. The video is accompanied by a guide that summarizes the content of the tape, offers additional tips for teaching adolescents, and invites the teacher to track her or his experience with the program.

Both the video for teachers and its companion guide are included in the resources developed for coordinators of the Horizons Program. Contact the program coordinator in your parish for further information.

Preparing the Learning Environment

The effectiveness of a course such as *The Bible: Power and Promise* depends, in part, on the physical surroundings of and community climate among the members of the group. High school students are likely to share their thoughts more readily and respond more positively if the space is comfortable and somewhat different from a typical school setting and the atmosphere is conducive to introspection and sharing. Here are two suggestions for creating that type of environment:

Create a good physical atmosphere. You will need a physically comfortable space with sufficient room for the participants to move around. Some sessions require the participants to spend reflection time alone. It will be easier for them to resist the temptation to visit with other participants if they have enough room to separate from one another. Comfortable furniture and living-room lighting will help create a homey feeling. A flip chart or an easel with a pad of newsprint will be helpful for many of the activities. The traditional classroom is the least desirable situation. If such a room is your only option, try using music, candles, icons, or other sensory devices to create a more inviting environment.

Note: See Special Preparation Needs, Specific Session Needs, later in this introduction for a discussion of some additional considerations regarding your meeting space for session 3.

Clarify expectations. At the beginning of the course, establish among the participants an atmosphere of mutual respect. Stress the importance of listening to one another and of refraining from hurtful remarks or put-downs. When necessary remind the participants of these rules. Even a brief cruel remark can ruin the experience for a young person with an already precarious self-image.

Preparing the Material

Before each session read through the session plan and try to picture the processes happening in your group. You may need to make some adjustments based on your knowledge of the participants and the physical setting. Some of the activities require preparation. This ranges from copying a simple list onto newsprint to creating and gathering props. Allow yourself adequate time to get ready.

All the sessions for this course include brief periods of teacher input. Some of these presentations are informational, but most are intended to bring closure to a part of the session so that the participants might understand the connections between life and faith, between themselves and God. The session plans offer guidelines for these brief talks. Spend time putting these presentations together so that they are clear and hold the attention of the participants. Where it is helpful and appropriate, do not be afraid to share parts of your own story with the young people.

Sharing Your Own Story

Every course in Horizons connects elements of the Christian faith with the life experiences of young people. As an adult you have much to share from your own life that will be of value to the young people. Your willingness to share your experiences will enrich this course. It will also send the message that telling one's personal story in the group is okay. When you share your experiences with the young people, you show that you trust them enough to speak from your heart. And without saying it you also invite them to do the same.

Some commonsense guidelines can help you share your story in a way that adds to the understanding of the participants but does not distract them from their own life story:

- Be brief and to the point. Remember, the young people are there to reflect on their own life story, not yours.
- Talk about your experiences as a teenager without preaching or moving into the fatal “When I was your age . . .” mode.
- Share only the things that young adolescents are emotionally prepared to handle.
- Be realistic. Talk about your struggles, triumphs, and growth over the years. This will let the participants know that self-knowledge is indeed a process. Do not mislead them into thinking that adults have all the answers. It is also unfair to suggest or imply that adolescents have no answers.
- Be honest and sincere. The young people will see through you if you are not, and your effectiveness as a teacher will be diminished.

Using Journals

Keeping a journal, or simply writing an occasional journal exercise, is a good way for young people to internalize learning, record the events of their life, keep track of feelings, or explore a topic further. Like most of the courses in the Horizons Program, *The Bible: Power and Promise* offers suggestions for including an optional journal component. These suggestions appear in the Alternative Approaches section for sessions 3 and 5. Also, the suggested Bible readings handouts for sessions 1, 3, and 4 can be used for journal writing. These handouts are sent home with the participants to encourage them to do some Bible study between sessions. Each one lists several readings, plus reflection questions for each reading, which can be answered in a journal.

Carefully assess whether the journal option is a good one in your particular situation. Consult the program coordinator and teachers of other courses. If you decide to incorporate journal activities into your course, some nitty-gritty questions must be answered: What materials are required? Will you respond to journal entries, and if so, in what way? What will you do if a young person reveals in a journal concerns or issues that demand a response beyond your ability or your authority as a teacher? For helpful information on these and other issues related to journal keeping, consult your program coordinator.

Using Music

Some of the activities in *The Bible: Power and Promise* suggest using music. No activities in this course require music or suggest only specific pieces of music, because cultural preferences and individual tastes differ and specific tapes, CDs, or needed equipment may not be available. But music is a central part of the world of most adolescents, and you are thus encouraged to use it in the suggested places as well as in other activities where you think that it might be appropriate. Circumstances in which music can be used effectively include the following:

Popular music for prayer. Depending on the character of the group, the community environment, or even the area of the country, different types of music will be popular among young people. If you are not certain about what might work in activities for your group, ask a few young people for their advice; ask them well in advance of the session, so that they can listen for songs that will be useful. Besides helping you, this experience can be affirming for young people, who are usually thought of as learners and are not usually consulted for their expertise.

You might even consider forming a music advisory group of participants, whose job is to listen to popular music and point out some things that pertain to your topic. Each week this group of young people can suggest to the rest of the participants selections that can be used for prayer—and also for reflection or as a starting point for journal writing.

Background music for reflection. Some groups are easily distracted by the sounds around them. If your group has a hard time concentrating in silence, consider using background music to help the participants focus. Even for those who do not have trouble concentrating, music can alter the mood and contribute to a sense of peace and inner silence. For background music use slow, soothing instrumental selections, preferably something that is unrecognizable to the group. Labels such as Windham Hill and Narada, which are known for their alternative adult-contemporary recordings, are particularly useful for this purpose. Some classical music can also help to create the type of environment you need. Or use recordings of natural sounds, such as those produced by an ocean surf, rain forests, or running streams.

Contemporary Christian music for discussion starter or prayer. Contemporary Christian music is produced by Christian artists and comes in styles for all tastes: rock, hard rock, country, alternative, rap, and easy listening. By using contemporary Christian music, you expose young people to an inspirational spiritual message in a form to which they may easily relate.

If you are familiar with contemporary Christian music, you probably can think of songs to introduce a discussion or to enhance a prayer service. If you are not familiar with contemporary Christian music, ask the young people in your group to help choose appropriate songs. Or visit a Christian bookstore. Many of them have an extensive music collection and a previewing area. Often their sales staff can point you in the right direction if you tell them what you are looking for.

Using This Course as a Retreat

The Bible: Power and Promise may be suitable for adaptation as a two-day retreat. It depends on the program, the timing, the leaders, the purpose, and above all the young people themselves. If you want to consider using *The Bible: Power and Promise* as a retreat, consult your program coordinator and together weigh the following advantages and disadvantages:

Advantages

- Because *The Bible: Power and Promise* provides a foundation for solid interpretation of the Bible, using it in a retreat would be an excellent way to launch ongoing Bible study groups or Bible sharing groups.
- The extended time in a retreat setting would allow for expanding the packed sessions of this course. This would open up opportunities for more journal writing and deeper sharing.
- A retreat setting would allow for the viewing of a good Bible video or movie.
- The simulation journey of session 3 would work especially well in a retreat setting.

- Incorporating a Mass during the retreat would give you an opportunity to expand on the topic of the Bible's use in the lectionary. By helping the participants study the lectionary readings in advance, you could model how to prepare to enter fully into the liturgy of the word.
- One-on-one time between adults and young people on retreat can open opportunities for discussing the struggles some young people might have about the trustworthiness of the Bible or the interpretation of specific passages.

Disadvantages

- *The Bible: Power and Promise* is rich in content and may be overwhelming taken in one intense experience.
- The preparation required for each session would be difficult for one or two people to handle before a single experience. A team approach to preparing for the retreat would be essential.
- The take-home handouts with Bible readings could not be done between sessions in a retreat setting.

Special Preparation Needs

Background Reading

Because a solid understanding of the church's teaching on the Scriptures is essential background for teaching this course, you may want to do some additional study. The article by Margaret Nutting Ralph included earlier in this introduction is a good place to start. If you wish to go deeper, Ralph's book *And God Said What?* on basic skills for reading the Scriptures is practical and easy to understand (see the Suggested Resources section at the end of this introduction for publication details on Ralph's book).

Also read paragraphs 50 to 141 of the *Catechism*. This section covers God's plan of revelation; the relationship between the apostolic tradition and the sacred Scriptures; inspiration and truth in the Scriptures; interpretation of the Scriptures; and the canon of the Scriptures—particularly the relationship between the Hebrew Scriptures and the Christian Testament. Another highly recommended church document on the Scriptures is the *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (Dei Verbum)*, from the Second Vatican Council.

Choosing Bibles

A class Bible. Find the most attractive Bible you can to serve as the class Bible. This Bible will be used for reference during various exercises, and also for an installation ritual in each session. A beat-up paperback Bible will not carry the sense of reverence you want to convey for that ritual.

Participant Bibles. This course calls for a lot of hands-on use of the Bible. You will need to provide Bibles for the young people to use during the sessions. Most parishes have Bibles available for religious education and youth ministry groups to use. When choosing which Bibles to provide, keep the following things in mind:

- They should be an accepted Catholic translation. The New American Bible and the New Revised Standard Version are recommended. The New Revised Standard Version is a more recent translation and uses gender-inclusive language where appropriate.
- You will need Bibles that include both the Hebrew Scriptures and the Christian Testament.
- Good Catholic study Bibles would be ideal. Avoid versions with fundamentalist interpretations and commentary that contradict what is taught in this course.
- Although in some situations it is helpful to compare different translations for study purposes, in this course it is best to ask the young people to use the same translation. This will help keep the focus on the task at hand and make it easier for choral reading during the prayer services.
- You may want to invite the young people to bring their own Bible from home, in order to help make the connection between what is presented in class and their regular use of the Bible. However, you will still need to have Bibles available for those who do not have their own, for those who forget to bring theirs, and to use in the Bible installations and other situations where everyone needs the same translation.
- You may want to present Bibles to the young people as gifts at the beginning or end of the course (see the alternative approaches for step C of session 1 and step F of session 5).

Specific Session Needs

- Session 2 starts with a short, staged dramatic event, requiring the help of a person from outside your group. Be sure to recruit and prepare this person well before the session.
- Most of session 3 revolves around a simulation journey consisting of six stops that correspond to different historical periods in the Hebrew Scriptures. Determine whether your normal meeting location is adequate for the simulation. If it is not, make arrangements to use another space for this session. Note that many props are needed for this simulation. Begin gathering and creating them well in advance so that you are not in a frenzy the day of the session.
- All the sessions in *The Bible: Power and Promise* include a variety of prayer services, learning activities, and brief presentations that require careful preparation and, in some cases, practice. By reading the entire course in advance, you can identify these elements. Note in particular the lists of materials needed and other necessary preparations, in the introductory section of every session.

This Course and Total Youth Ministry

Additional Youth Ministry Program Suggestions

The Horizons Program includes a manual entitled *Youth Ministry Strategies: Creative Activities to Complement the Horizons Curriculum*. It contains a variety of activities and strategies organized into thematic categories and cross-referenced according to the courses in the curriculum. It includes suggestions for shortened and extended programs, off-site events, intergenerational gatherings, parish involvement, and prayer and liturgical celebrations.

This valuable resource can enhance the young people's experience of the Horizons Program and help your parish fulfill a commitment to total youth ministry. Contact your program coordinator about the availability of the manual.

Parish Program Connections

A religious education curriculum is, ideally, just one component of a total parish program in which all those responsible for the formation of young people work together with the entire parish to meet the holistic needs of its youth. *The Bible: Power and Promise* can be valuable preparation for connections with other youth ministry experiences. You might develop these connections by doing the following:

- Bring in people from the community who can witness about the power of the Scriptures in their life, particularly during searching or difficult times. Members of your community with inspiring commitment and powerful stories can make a brief presentation during an opening or closing prayer service.
- If your parish offers a vacation Bible school program, encourage participants to volunteer during it.
- Encourage group members to plan and carry out a fund-raiser for the American Bible Society or other organizations that make Bibles available to people who need them around the world.
- Often people involved in criminal justice ministry need Bibles to give to prisoners in jails and prisons. Contact your diocesan staff for information about prison ministry in your area. If such ministry exists and needs Bibles, encourage the young people to sponsor a Bible donation weekend at the parish.
- In the last session of this course, the young people develop a Bible wisdom list. Make arrangements to have this list printed in the parish newsletter or parish bulletin, to share with the entire parish.

Family Connections

Most parents want to know what their child is learning. And parents are generally entitled to know what is going on in this program and how they can be involved if they choose to be. Good communication with families places program leaders in partnership with parents and young people as the young people grow in faith. The Alternative Approaches section for several of the sessions in this course include suggestions for family connections; this section is located at the end of each session.

Before the start of the course, consider putting together and sending to the participants' families a flyer or letter that contains the following information:

- an outline of *The Bible: Power and Promise*, including the session titles, the content of each session, and the goals and objectives
- a copy of handout 5-A, "Making the Bible a Part of Your Life," to identify what the course is leading up to
- an invitation for parents to attend session 3, to experience the Hebrew Scriptures simulation journey, if you have chosen to include parents in that session
- a request to keep you and all the young people in prayer

Goals and Objectives in This Course

Why Use Goals and Objectives?

Curriculums take on greater clarity, direction, and purpose if they are described in terms of their goals and objectives. This observation is based on a commonsense principle: We have a difficult time getting somewhere if we do not know where we are going. Educators who design learning experiences must identify their destination as a first step in determining how to get there. The statement of goals and objectives is a practical way to identify the desired outcomes for a program.

In the Horizons Program, goals and objectives are used in the following ways:

Goals. Goals are broad statements of what we wish to accomplish—learning outcomes we hope to achieve. The coordinator's manual for the Horizons Program provides the goals for the entire curriculum. Each course within the total program also includes a statement of its goals. The goals often have an idealistic quality, inviting the teacher to reflect on how the course relates to the personal and faith development of the young people. At the same time, the course goals are realistic, measurable, and attainable. As a teacher, at the end of the course, you should be able to look back and determine if you have in fact achieved the course goals.

Objectives. Objectives are statements that define how to get to the goals. They name the specific tasks that must be accomplished if the goals are to be achieved. Each course supplies a clear statement of objectives for each session in the course.

The Goals and Objectives of The Bible: Power and Promise

Goals

This course has six goals:

- That the young people appreciate how the Bible, as a part of our culture, has already influenced their life and beliefs
- That they learn about the literary forms contained in the Bible and understand how those forms aid our proper understanding of the Bible
- That they understand the process by which the biblical books were written and included in the canon of the Bible
- That they learn to interpret biblical writings in their proper context and avoid fundamentalist approaches to biblical interpretation
- That they develop a deeper understanding of key biblical events and the people associated with them
- That they complete the course with a deeper respect for the Scriptures and an increased desire to make the Scriptures a part of their life

Objectives

Each session has its own objectives, which will help realize the six course goals. The objectives of *The Bible: Power and Promise* follow:

Session 1: "The World's Best Seller"

- To help the young people identify the many ways the message of the Bible affects our personal life and our society
- To review with them basic Bible information and skills
- To enable them to identify various literary forms in the Scriptures and to lead them to appreciate how those forms help us understand God's message

Session 2: "How the Bible Was Written"

- To introduce the young people to the five-stage process that produced the Bible as we know it today
- To review with them some important people and events in the Bible
- To help them understand the literary form of myth through a study of the Garden of Eden story

Session 3: "Salvation History in the Hebrew Scriptures"

- To expose the young people to the main events of salvation history in the Hebrew Scriptures
- To reflect with them on how the themes of salvation history are present in their life

Session 4: "Proclaiming Jesus! An Overview of the Christian Testament"

- To review with the young people the content and development of the Christian Testament
- To introduce to them some of the literary forms found in the Christian Testament
- To examine with them how the Christian Testament presents Jesus as the fulfillment of the hopes for a messiah

Session 5: "The Bible and Life"

- To help the young people distinguish between different kinds of truth and understand the kind of truth taught in the Bible
- To introduce to them ways to make the Bible a regular part of their spiritual growth
- To let them search for wisdom in the Bible and apply it to their life

Suggested Resources

Entire catalogs are devoted to Bible study aids and resources. Many of these materials are excellent and reliable, others are questionable at best. The following resources are referred to in the course or were used in developing it, or both. You may find these helpful in your own preparation and in answering questions that arise during the course.

Background

Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Trans. United States Catholic Conference (USCC). Washington, DC: USCC, 1994.

Ralph, Margaret Nutting. "And God Said What?" *An Introduction to Biblical Literary Forms for Bible Lovers*. New York: Paulist Press, 1986.

Vatican Council II. *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (Dei Verbum)*. 18 November 1965.

Bible Study

Achtemeier, Paul J., gen. ed. *Harper's Bible Dictionary*. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1985.

Bergant, Dianne, and Robert J. Karris, gen. eds. *The Collegeville Bible Commentary*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1989.

Brown, Raymond E., Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy, eds. *The New Jerome Bible Handbook*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992.

———. *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1990.

Hartdegen, Stephen J., gen. ed. *Nelson's Complete Concordance of the New American Bible*. Toronto: Welch, 1977.

Senior, Donald, gen. ed. *The Catholic Study Bible*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.

Music

Grant, Amy. *Collection*. RCA 7863-66258-2.

———. *Straight Ahead*. RCA 7863-66256-2.

Videos

Abraham. In the TNT Bible Collection. TNT Productions. 150 minutes. Available from Oblate Media, 7315 Manchester, Saint Louis, MO 63143; phone 800-233-4629; fax 314-644-5020.

A.D. Directed by Stuart Cooper. 1985. 360 minutes. Available from Oblate Media.

Jacob. In the TNT Bible Collection. TNT Productions. 150 minutes. Available from Oblate Media.

Jesus: From the Gospel series. Three videos: *The Birth*, 40 minutes; *The Parable*, 45 minutes; *The Passion*, 45 minutes. Distributed by the Genesis Project, N.V., 65 Blecker Street, New York, NY 10012. Available from Bridgestone Multimedia Group,

300 North McKemy Avenue, Chandler, AZ 85226; phone 800-523-0988; fax 602-940-8924.

Jesus and His Time series. Reader's Digest Association, 1991. Three 1-hour videos. Available from Saint Mary's Press, 702 Terrace Heights, Winona, MN 55987-1320; phone 800-533-8095; fax 800-344-9225.

Jesus of Nazareth. Produced by Franco Zeffirelli. 371 minutes. Available from Oblate Media.

Joseph. In the TNT Bible Collection. TNT Productions. 150 minutes. Available from Oblate Media.

Mysteries of the Bible series. Produced by Bram Roos. Multimedia Entertainment and Film Roos in association with Arts and Entertainment (A&E) Network, A&E Home Video, 1993. Thirteen 50-minute episodes on six cassettes. Hosted by Richard Kiley and Jean Simmons. Other videos by A&E are also usually excellent.

Time Travel Through the Bible. International Lutheran Laymen's League, 1990. 107 minutes. Features Jonathan Frakes exploring the archaeological evidence supporting the Hebrew Scriptures and the Christian Testament. Includes some biblical history. Distributed by Vision Video, P.O. Box 540, Worcester, PA 19490; phone 610-584-1893; fax 610-584-4610.

Other Resources

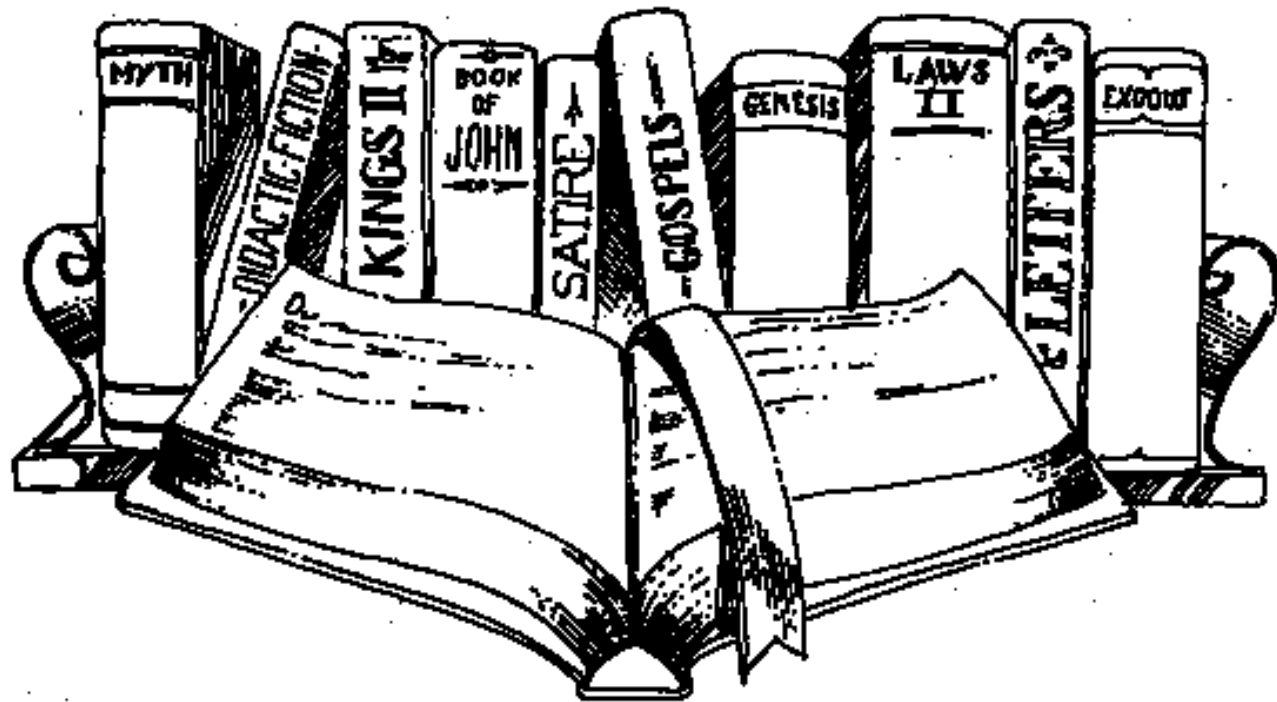
The Bible Library for Catholics. ID no. D1130. A CD-ROM for Windows and DOS, with three complete Catholic Bible translations, Nave's Topical Index, search software, and more. Available from Liguori Publications, One Liguori Drive, Liguori, MO 63057-9989; phone 800-325-9521.

Bible timeline. A good, accurate Bible timeline in the form of a wall chart (item no. 4310), a transparency (item no. 4700), and a student handout (item no. 4322). Available from Crossways International, 7930 Computer Avenue South, Minneapolis, MN 55435-5415; phone 612-832-5454; fax 612-832-5553.

Charlton Heston's Voyage Through the Bible, New Testament, and Charlton Heston's Voyage Through the Bible, Old Testament. Two CD-ROMs for IBM compatible and Macintosh computers. Combine video of historical sights, biblical stories told by Heston, interactive tours of important biblical places, and more. Distributed by Jones Digital Century; phone 800-435-7390.

SESSION 1

The World's Best Seller



Objectives

- To help the young people identify the many ways the message of the Bible affects our personal life and our society
- To review with them basic Bible information and skills
- To enable them to identify various literary forms in the Scriptures and to lead them to appreciate how those forms help us understand God's message

Session Steps

- a welcome, introductions, and introductory exercise (15 minutes)
- a forced-choice exercise and reflective sharing on the importance of the Bible (15 minutes)
- a Bible installation and distribution (10 minutes)
- a review of the Bible's structure (10 minutes)
- a break (10 minutes)
- a media search and presentation on literary forms (25 minutes)
- a Scripture study on the Book of Jonah (25 minutes)
- announcements and a closing prayer (10 minutes)

Background for the Teacher

In this session you review with the young people basic Bible knowledge and skills and introduce to them the idea that the Bible is a library of books of different literary forms. Several engaging activities help you accomplish these objectives. As the session unfolds, you can begin to gauge the young people's present knowledge about and skills in using the Bible. Such information can help you identify what to emphasize in later sessions.

After an informal welcome and introductions, the participants engage in a forced-choice exercise to uncover what they know about the Bible. The exercise also conveys some insights about the Bible's influence through the ages. This should be fun and relaxed and should give you the opportunity to make some basic points about the Bible.

The forced-choice exercise leads into a short discussion in which the young people share on a more personal level how the Bible has influenced their life. The intention is not to make anyone feel guilty about not using the Bible, or to force a premature commitment to studying the Bible. Rather, it is simply to help the young people uncover the role the Bible already plays in their life.

Next, the participants prayerfully install the class Bible. This ritual is repeated in each session of this course. It is done with simplicity and reverence. The ritual expresses to the group members that the Bible is not just another book and that they are learning about something very important in this course. As part of the installation for this first session, the young people receive their own individual Bibles, either as gifts or simply for use during this course.

After the installation ritual, the participants take a quick tour of the Bibles they have just received. For most this tour may be a review of very familiar information; it is included to ensure that those with little background will have the basic knowledge and skills they need to accomplish the tasks in this course.

Following a break you introduce the idea of literary forms. The young people then work in small groups to identify literary forms commonly found in newspapers. The activity ends with a short presentation on the literary forms in the Bible.

The next activity focuses on one short book of the Bible, Jonah. In this activity the young people explore how knowledge of the book's literary form—satirical fiction—gives us a deeper understanding of what God is saying through its story. You may wish that you had more time to help the participants unpack the meaning of Jonah; remember that the central point of the activity is to help the young people understand the influence of literary form.

Before dismissing the young people, you invite someone to volunteer to give the Bible reflection during the Bible installation in the next session. You also invite all the young people to do some Bible reading before the next session, using handout 1-B, "Week 1 Suggested Bible Readings," as a guide. The session concludes with a prayer led by you.

Preparation

Materials Needed

- pens or pencils
- sheets of blank paper
- a class Bible and bookmark
- green, red, and yellow construction paper
- a scissors
- a small table, a cloth table covering, a candle and matches, and other items for the prayer space (such as flowers and a lamp)
- one copy of resource 1-A, "Bible Installation Outline"
- a tape or CD player, and reflective music (optional)
- a Bible and bookmark for each participant
- newsprint
- markers
- tape
- an outrageous story in a tabloid
- major daily newspapers, one for every four participants
- copies of handout 1-A, "A Bible Study on the Book of Jonah," one for each participant
- one copy of resource 1-B, "Session 2 Scripture Reflection"
- copies of handout 1-B, "Week 1 Suggested Bible Readings," one for each participant



Other Necessary Preparations

Prepare to lead this session by doing the following things and checking them off as you accomplish them:

- For step C. Create a prayer space as described in step C.
- For step C. Review the Bible installation procedure and resource 1–A as recommended in step C.
- For step C. Mark the Scripture reading in the class Bible as directed in step C.
- For step C. Prepare to give the Scripture reflection as instructed in step C.
- For step C. Gather the participant Bibles and mark the closing prayer in them as directed in step C.
- For step D. Read the information on the Bible's structure in part 1 of step D and prepare to present it in your own words.
- For steps E and F. Prepare newsprint sheets with the titles of literary forms as described in step F.
- For step F. Find an outrageous story in a tabloid and gather copies of major newspapers, as discussed in step F.
- For step F. Prepare a short presentation on literary forms in the Bible, as outlined in part 4 of step F.
- For step G. Read the Book of Jonah in the Bible, and any background commentary on the points mentioned in step G that you can easily find.
- Determine if you wish to change this session by using one or more of the alternative approaches at the end of this session plan.



Opening Teacher Prayer

Before you start your preparations for this session, take a few quiet moments to reflect on the title of this course, *The Bible: Power and Promise*, in light of these eloquent words addressed to Timothy in the Bible:

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is inspired by God

and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work. (2 Tim. 3:14–17)

The author of Second Timothy believed in the power of the Scriptures in many different settings. The author also knew the promise of God for our salvation. This writer saw the combination of God's power and promise as necessary to equip Christians "for every good work."

How do you see the time you spend with young people as a response to God's presence in your life? How has God touched you through the Bible? Has the Bible provided guidance for your life, inspiration to live morally, courage to help others even when doing so is inconvenient or difficult? Take a few moments to praise God for this life-giving word. Thank God for the good work that you hope will be accomplished through you in this course.

Procedure

A Welcome, Introductions, and Introductory Exercise (15 minutes)

1. Warmly greet the young people as they arrive. If the participants do not already know you, introduce yourself and give a little personal background about your work, your family, interesting hobbies, and so on. If they do not know one another, invite them to introduce themselves to the group. Keep the introductions brief and casual.

2. Announce that you are going to start with a friendly round of a game called Bible book tag. This exercise will give an insight into how much the group already knows about the Bible.

Ask the group members to pair up. Give each person a pen or a pencil and a sheet of blank paper. Then read the following rules:

- The goal of the game is to be the person with the most names of different books from the Bible on your sheet.
- When the signal is given, start brainstorming names with your partner and write them down on your sheet.
- When you and your partner have hit a dead end, tag another pair and switch partners. Compare lists with your new partner, and add any different books identified by this partner.

- You may tag another pair and exchange partners as many times as you wish.
- You must spend at least 15 seconds with each new partner.
- If your pair is tagged, you must switch partners unless you have not been together for 15 seconds.
- The person who has the most names of books of the Bible after 3 minutes wins. Spelling does not count as long as the name is recognizable.

3. When all understand the instructions, give the signal to begin. Call time in 3 minutes, or earlier if it is apparent that all have exhausted their knowledge of biblical books.

4. Direct the participants to count the number of books on their sheet. Then invite the person with the greatest number to read the names from his or her sheet while you or another student checks the names for accuracy using the index in the front of the class Bible. Congratulate the winner.

B Forced-Choice Exercise and Reflective Sharing: The Importance of the Bible (15 minutes)

Before the session. Cut sheets of green, red, and yellow construction paper into four equal rectangles. Then arrange the rectangles in sets of three, with one rectangle of each color in each set. Prepare one set of rectangles for every two people in your group.

1. Ask everyone to take a seat with their last partner from the previous activity. Give each pair one set of colored rectangles. Explain that you are going to read a series of statements about the Bible. The participants will have a few seconds to decide with their partner whether the statement is true or false. If a pair thinks the statement is true, it holds up a green rectangle. If a pair thinks the statement is false, it holds up a red rectangle. If a pair is not sure, it holds up a yellow rectangle. After all the pairs have responded, you will announce the correct answer. Each pair is to keep track of how many correct answers it gives.

2. Read the following statements. Pause briefly after each to let the pairs make their decision. Then give the correct answer with the brief commentary provided, preferably in your own words.

- The Bible is not one book but a collection of many different books. [True. The Catholic Bible consists of seventy-three separate books: forty-six in the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) and twenty-seven in the Christian Testament (New Testament).]
- Protestant Bibles contain fewer books in the Christian Testament than do Catholic Bibles. [False. Catholics and Protestants agree on which books to include in the Christian Testament. However, they disagree on which books to include in the Hebrew Scriptures.]
- The Bible was written over a period spanning more than a thousand years. [True. Certain parts of the Hebrew Scriptures were probably written about a thousand years before the birth of Jesus, and the final book of the Christian Scriptures was probably written eighty to one hundred years after Christ's death and Resurrection.]
- The Bible teaches that the world was literally created in six days. [False. The Creation stories are symbolic in that they are imaginative tales of cosmic proportions that convey deep, spiritual truth. The author never intended that they be taken as scientific truth—and God does not expect us to understand them that way.]
- The four Gospels are essentially biographies of Jesus. [False. Contrary to popular opinion, the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are not really biographies. They give us no dates, tell us virtually nothing about Jesus' childhood and young adulthood, vary regarding the sequence of events in his ministry, and even disagree on geographic settings for important events.]
- The church teaches that we can rely on the Bible's truth whenever it speaks of things we need for our salvation. [True. Number 107 of the *Catechism* says, "The books of Scripture firmly, faithfully, and without error teach that truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided to the Sacred Scriptures."]
- The Bible contains everything we need to know about our faith. [False. The Catholic church teaches that we also need to know about our Catholic Tradition, as passed on by the Apostles and their successors. The Bible and our sacred Tradition complement and illumine each other so that we can know the fullness of God's revelation.]

- The Bible was originally written in Hebrew and Greek. [True. Most of the Hebrew Scriptures were written in Hebrew and a little Aramaic, and the Christian Testament was written in Greek.]
- The Bible has been the world's best seller since people started keeping track of such a thing. [True. It is not even listed on the New York Times list of best-sellers because it would always be in first place! And the Bible has been translated more than any other book, into almost every language.]
- Martin Luther invented the printing press primarily to mass-produce Bibles for the general public. [False. Trick question! The printing press was developed primarily to mass-produce Bibles, but it was invented by Johannes Gutenberg.]

Some of these points will likely cause debate and raise questions. Do not get drawn into any lengthy discussion at this point, but do affirm any questions that raise complex issues and assure the young people that many of their questions will be dealt with during the course. You might wish to note such questions to ensure they are answered in future sessions.

Before you move on, take a quick tally of how well the pairs did at giving the correct answers to the statements. Affirm everyone for their participation. If any of the pairs responded correctly to all or most of the statements, congratulate them on their knowledge of the Bible.

3. Tell the group that the world would be a very different place today without the Bible's influence. Invite the participants to consider these two examples:

- Your name would probably be very different, because most of us were given Christian names at birth or baptism. Without the Bible there would have been no Christianity and therefore no Christian names.
- The world would probably be an even more violent place than it is today. Jesus' teaching on peace and forgiveness has had great influence through the centuries.

4. Ask the young people to take a moment to think of other examples. Then invite volunteers to share their examples with the whole group. Affirm their answers and build from them to make comments similar to the following ones in order to introduce this course:

- Tell the participants that whereas the Bible is an important piece of literature worthy of anyone's study, Christians have a greater reason to be familiar with it: they believe that the Bible is truly the word of God and recognize it as a primary, inspired way the divine truth revealed in Christ is passed on to us.
- Explain that this course is designed to help them look at how the Bible developed and how Catholics interpret it. Its sessions invite them to explore major themes and events of the Christian Scriptures. The course also presents a method for properly understanding the message of the Bible.
- Express your own excitement about leading the course. Stress that you want the participants to feel comfortable asking questions about the Bible and its message. They should also feel free to ask questions about what they have heard other people say about the Bible. Acknowledge that you may not have all the answers to all their questions, and assure them that you will do your best to find answers and to share clearly the Catholic teaching.
- Explain that in the course they will be asked to look up and study passages from the Bible. You will provide Bibles for everyone to use during the sessions. If you want to, invite the young people to bring their own Bible from home to use as well.

C Bible Installation and Distribution (10 minutes)

Each session of *The Bible: Power and Promise* begins with a ritual reverencing the sacred Scriptures. The format of the ritual is the same for each session, but the Scripture reading, reflection, and closing prayer within it change.

Before the session. Prepare a suitable prayer space for your group. The ideal space might be a corner that is visible throughout the session but not in the way during other activities. It must be a space in which all the young people of your group can gather. In this space set up a small table with an attractive cloth covering to use as a stand for the class Bible. Arrange a candle on the table—a used Christ candle from the church is wonderful. Fresh or dried flowers offer a nice extra touch. A lamp providing subdued, indirect lighting helps set the atmosphere. Use your imagination to make your prayer space special.

Read through the entire Bible installation procedure and review resource 1–A, “Bible Installation Outline.” You may wish to keep resource 1–A handy for quick reference during the installation ritual.

If you wish to use reflective music for the opening prayer, select the music and set up a tape or CD player.

Place a bookmark in the class Bible at the session's Scripture reading, 2 Tim. 3:14–17.

Prepare to give the Scripture reflection as directed in part 4 of this step.

Gather the participant Bibles and neatly arrange them in front of the table where the class Bible will be installed. Place a bookmark in each participant Bible at the closing prayer, Ps. 119:9–16.

1. *Introduction.* Gather the group in a circle in the prayer space and invite the young people to sit down. Call for two volunteers, one who will place the class Bible reverently on the table and one who will proclaim the Scripture reading for the Bible installation. Explain the order of the ritual as it is presented here and outlined in resource 1–A, and rehearse the signing gesture for the opening prayer so that everyone is familiar with it. Point out that this gesture is performed by the priest and congregation before the reading of the Gospel at Mass.

2. *Opening prayer.* Turn on reflective music, if you chose to use it, and lower the lights. Light the candle in the prayer space. Allow 30 seconds or so of silent reflection.

Signal the first volunteer to bring the class Bible to the front of the prayer space. When the volunteer is in front of the group, instruct him or her to hold the class Bible high and say, “Praise be to God for giving us this holy word.”

Lead all the group members in responding together, “May God's word be in my thoughts [making the sign of the cross with thumb on forehead], on my lips [making the sign of the cross with thumb on lips], and in my heart [making the sign of the cross with thumb over heart].”

Ask the volunteer with the class Bible to place it on the table and return to the group.

3. *Scripture reading.* Direct the second volunteer to go to the class Bible, bow before it, and then pick it up and proclaim the Scripture reading, 2 Tim. 3:14–17. When the reader is finished, instruct him or her to say, “The word of the Lord.” Lead the group in responding, “Thanks be to God.”

4. *Scripture reflection.* Give a 1- to 3-minute reflection on the reading, including the following points:

- This letter is addressed to Timothy, who as a young man was recruited by Paul to accompany Paul on his missionary journeys. Now Timothy is a leader in the early Christian communities.
- In the letter Timothy is warned that fully living as Christians is dangerous. Every community contains members who claim to have heard the Gospel but who are more self-centered than God-centered. That is, they love pleasure more than they love God.
- Timothy is urged not to lose his focus on living the Gospel. He is directed to be faithful to what he has learned from the Scriptures because the Scriptures are inspired by God and are an essential foundation of the Christian life.
- These directions apply to us just as they did to Timothy. Christians through the centuries have witnessed that a love for and familiarity with the Bible are an important foundation for living a full Christian life. This does not mean that we have to be able to quote Scripture passages off the top of our head, or that we have to start at the beginning of the Bible and read straight through to the end. On the other hand, if we never take time to look for God and personal direction in the Bible's stories, we miss a wonderful tool for experiencing God and growing spiritually.

5. *Distribution of participant Bibles (session 1 only).* Give a Bible to each member of your group in turn. As you place the Bible in her or his hands, say, “[Participant's name], may God's word inspire you to live the Good News.” Instruct the young person to respond “Amen.”

6. *Closing prayer.* The closing prayer for this session is a recitation of Ps. 119:9–16. Direct the young people to turn to the place marked in their Bible. Then lead the group in reciting this passage aloud, using one of these three methods:

- Divide the group in half and instruct the halves to alternate reading the verses.
- Ask a different person to read each verse.
- Invite the participants to read the entire passage together as a group.

D Review: The Bible's Structure (10 minutes)

The following directions presume that the young people have a working familiarity with the Bible. If members of your group have little or no Bible experience, see the alternative approaches at the end of this session plan.

1. Invite the young people to move to your regular meeting area. Then give a short presentation on the overall structure of the Bible, covering the following points briefly in your own words and style. Expand on these points only if you encounter questions or an apparent lack of understanding.

- Note that the Bible is not a single book but a collection, or library, of books. And the books consist of different kinds of writings: short stories, letters, poems, proverbs, laws, and so on.
- Turn to the Bible's index together. Point out that whereas the Catholic Bible contains forty-six books in the Hebrew Scriptures, most Protestant Bibles contain only thirty-nine. The other seven books are called deuterocanonical books. Most Protestant Christians do not accept these books as authentic, and group them in a separate section of the Bible.
- Ask the young people to find the Hebrew Scriptures (from the beginning of Genesis to the end of Malachi). Point out that Christians traditionally called this larger section of the Bible the Old Testament. However, for people of the Jewish faith, its books make up the entire Scriptures and are considered not old but even new. Therefore, today many Christians call these books the Hebrew Scriptures or Jewish Scriptures, out of respect for Judaism.
- Next, point out the remainder of the Bible, which Christians traditionally referred to as the New Testament. Today many prefer to call it the Christian Testament. Note that Christians accept the whole collection of books, the Hebrew Scriptures and the Christian Testament together, and refer to it as the Christian Scriptures. Both Christians and Jews use the term *Bible*, even though they are referring to different collections of writings.
- If the Bibles used by the group have special features like maps, concordances, a dictionary, background articles, and so on, point these out with a few words about their purpose.

- Ask if the participants have any questions on how to find a Bible passage when given a citation. If they are all familiar with looking up Bible passages, continue with the activity. If group members seem uncertain about how to look up a passage, briefly review the process.

2. To check their understanding, give the young people one of the following passages to find. After everyone has found the passage, ask these two questions about it:

- Is this passage from the Hebrew Scriptures or the Christian Testament?
- Have you seen this passage before? If so, where?

Appropriate responses are given in parentheses for each passage.

- Gen. 4:9. "Then the LORD said to Cain, 'Where is your brother Abel?' He said, 'I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?'" (Hebrew Scriptures. Sometimes quoted when people want to avoid responsibility after doing something wrong.)
- Psalm 23. "The LORD is my shepherd . . ." (Hebrew Scriptures. Often appears in movies or books where a character is in trouble. Sometimes said in prayers for the sick or at funerals.)
- Isa. 11:6. "The wolf shall live with the lamb, / the leopard shall lie down with the kid, / the calf and the lion and the fatling together, / and a little child shall lead them." (Hebrew Scriptures. Often quoted by people talking about peace.)
- Eccles. 3:1–8. "For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven . . ." (Hebrew Scriptures. Heard as the refrain in an old pop song. Often read at funerals.)
- Luke 6:31. "Do to others as you would have them do to you." (Christian Testament. The Golden Rule, quoted by many people as a principle for making moral decisions.)
- John 3:16. "'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.'" (Christian Testament. Citation seen on signs at sporting events. Often recited by people trying to evangelize others to Christianity.)
- 1 Cor. 13:4–8. "Love is patient; love is kind . . ." (Christian Testament. Often heard at weddings.)
- Rev. 13:18. "This calls for wisdom: let anyone with understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a person. Its number is six hundred sixty-six." (Christian Testament. The number 666 is often seen in movies and writings about the satanic and the occult.)

- 3. Repeat the process in step 2 with one or two other passages from the list.

- 4. Conclude by noting that the Bible's influence is widespread in our society. Many people, even those who would not consider themselves very religious, encounter it during important events in their life.

E Break (10 minutes)

During the break post the newsprint sheets prepared for step F where all can see them.

F Media Search and Presentation: Literary Forms (25 minutes)

Before the session. Write each of the following literary forms at the top of a separate sheet of newsprint: advice, debate, human interest, advertisement, cartoon, editorial, and news (event) reporting. Write "Other" at the top of an eighth sheet of newsprint. Post these in your meeting area during the break.

Find an outrageous story—for example, something about space aliens or Bigfoot—in the kind of tabloid found in drugstore and supermarket checkout lanes. Bring the entire tabloid to this session.

Gather several complete copies of major daily newspapers, at least one copy for every four group members. They do not have to be from the same day.

Prepare to give the presentation in part 4 of this step in your own words and style.

1. Tell the group members that you have recently read a shocking true-life story that has tremendous implications for society today. Then read your outrageous story with a perfectly serious face, holding the tabloid so that all can see its title while you read. If the participants laugh or object, ask them why they are not taking you seriously. Ask them if they believe that this story is true. If not, why not? What are the clues that this story might be exaggerated or fictional? (The main clue is where it came from—a tabloid.)

Explain that you were interpreting as factual news reporting something that was clearly intended as entertainment (though presented in a news format). Different types of writing—for example, humor, factual history, poetry, and science fiction—are called literary styles or literary forms.

2. Announce that you want the participants to try to find different literary forms in something they are all familiar with, a daily newspaper. Divide the group into teams of three or four. Give each team a copy of a major daily newspaper. Referring to the newsprint sheets posted during the break, tell the young people that each sheet has the name of a literary form they might find in a newspaper. Each team is to identify and cut from its newspaper one sample for each of the seven forms identified on the newsprint sheets. It should then tape the samples on the appropriate sheets. Also challenge the teams to find an example of a literary form that is not listed on the newsprint sheets, and instruct them to tape that example on the newsprint sheet titled "Other." Finally, ask them to pick one of their examples and be ready to explain to the rest of the group how it could be misinterpreted if one did not understand the form—as happened with your story from the tabloid.

Allow the teams about 7 to 10 minutes for this task.

3. Invite the teams to take turns reporting. Ask each team if it was able to identify something from the paper for each of the forms listed on newsprint, and if it found a literary form that was not listed on newsprint. (Examples of other literary forms the teams might have found are letter, gossip column, list, marriage notice, and obituary.) Finally, ask the team to explain how one of its articles could be misunderstood if the reader did not know the literary form.

4. After all the teams have reported, move into a short presentation on literary forms in the Bible. The intent is to tie what the young people have just experienced, to an understanding of literary forms in the Bible. Cover the following main points in your own words:

- We can distinguish between literary forms by both their external and their internal characteristics. These characteristics are like clues to understanding the literary form. External characteristics are generally obvious in writings like poems, cartoon strips, and tabloid news stories. Internal characteristics include things such as the attitude, the tone, and the purpose of the writing. To pick up internal characteristics or clues, the reader must commonly know something about the history, people, and geography of the culture.

- People from other cultures have a difficult time picking up on the internal characteristics that identify and help us understand a given literary form. For example, if people unfamiliar with the culture of baseball were told that four men died on first base, they might wonder how such violence could be permitted in the game! That is one reason we need scholars to guide us in our study of the Bible. These learned people research the cultural setting at the time of the writing to help the contemporary reader understand the internal characteristics of biblical writings.
- The Bible is more like a newspaper than, say, a history book when it comes to literary forms. The different books of the Bible were written by many different people who lived in diverse times and settings. They used many different literary forms to get across their point about God and their experience as a people. Christians believe that through these authors and through their literary forms, God communicates to us.

Keep in mind that some young people may take the attitude: “I just want to read the Bible for inspiration and direction. All this technical stuff only makes it more confusing.” Assure these young people that all this background is not intended to take away from the spiritual and moral truths in the Bible. Rather, it helps us come to a deeper and more accurate understanding of what God is trying to communicate.

Other young people may believe that everything in the Bible is historically and scientifically accurate. Explain that in the last session of this course, they will deal more specifically with the question of truth in the Bible—an important question on which Catholics differ from some other Christians.

G Scripture Study: The Book of Jonah (25 minutes)

1. Ask the participants to form small groups of five or six. Distribute a copy of handout 1–A, “A Bible Study on the Book of Jonah,” to each person. Tell the young people that they will now study the Book of Jonah using the handout as a guide. Direct the groups to space themselves out in the room to avoid distracting one another. Review with them the Bible study outlined on the handout, and then tell them to begin.

While the groups are discussing, move among them and spend some time listening to their conversation. Avoid directing their discussion unless they seem to be floundering, completely off the topic, or missing the point entirely.

2. After about 15 minutes, gather the small groups in the prayer space. Then ask the groups the following questions, affirming their answers and expanding on them if necessary:

- What is the message about God conveyed in the Book of Jonah? [God loves all nations, not just the Hebrew nation.]
- Why did the author of Jonah create a humorous, fictional story to get this point across? [The author did this to get the people of the time to identify with Jonah, and to make it easier to recognize their prejudices by poking fun at them.]
- How did knowing the literary form change your understanding of the story? [It took the focus off peripheral issues like how Jonah survived three days in a fish and why the Ninevites converted so easily. Knowing the form makes it clear that the main point is about what God is like and what God would have us do, not about Jonah’s reluctance as a prophet or Nineveh’s quick conversion.]

Share briefly that some people approach the Bible as being literally true in all ways, scientifically and historically as well as spiritually. For such Christians it is almost heresy to suggest that the Bible contains fiction or legend or myth. Catholics believe that the Bible contains the truth, but also that we must properly understand the literary forms a passage is using in order to discover that truth. Because we appreciate the literary forms, we do not look for scientific or historical truths that the author never intended to convey. The belief that the Bible is without error in teaching us spiritual and moral truth is called the belief in the inerrancy of the Bible. And that is a belief that Catholics share with other Christians.

H Announcements and Closing Prayer (10 minutes)

1. Call for a volunteer to give a short reflection on the Scripture reading during the Bible installation in the next session. Note that you have a guide sheet to help the volunteer prepare for that task. It should take only 10 or 15 minutes of preparation time. This is the participants’ chance to give a

homily! Announce that you will do this for each session, so several people will get a chance. Do not be concerned if no one volunteers this time; the participants may be more comfortable in later sessions. If someone does volunteer, give them a copy of resource 1–B, “Session 2 Scripture Reflection.”

2. Distribute handout 1–B, “Week 1 Suggested Bible Readings.” Tell the group that this is not homework, but just an invitation to do some personal reading in the Bible between sessions. The handout suggests some passages to read, and gives some background and reflection questions for each passage. The young people may complete as many readings as they wish. Mention that this first week’s readings are on Jacob, the Bible’s biggest con man.

3. Thank the young people for their participation in this first session on the Bible. If you want to, suggest that if they would like to bring their own Bible to the next session, they should feel free to do so. Then invite them to take a moment of silence to thank God for God’s power and promise in the Scriptures.

4. Lead a closing prayer like the following in your own words:

- God, we praise you for revealing yourself to us in the Bible. May we make that collection of books a foundation for our life and a constant companion in our journey with you. We pray this in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Reverently remove the class Bible from its place on the table and blow out the candle marking its presence. Collect the participant Bibles and store them until the next session.

Alternative Approaches

After reading the session plan, you may choose to do some things differently or to make additions to an activity. Consider your time limitations first and then these alternative approaches:

For step A. If you think an activity with less physical movement would work better for your group, try this: Direct the participants to work alone or ask them to pair up. Give each person or pair a handout with ten sayings on it, and ask the participants to identify which of the sayings come from the Bible.

You will need to create your own handout for this. You may use the following sayings or substitute other phrases from the Bible and popular proverbs you think are more appropriate—or confusing! If you use the sayings listed here, omit the answers (given in parentheses) on the handout.

- “Those who live by the sword shall die by the sword.” (From the Bible, adapted from Jesus’ words in Matt. 26:52)
- “A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.” (Not from the Bible)
- “Spare the rod, spoil the child.” (From the Bible, adapted from Prov. 13:24)
- “Give me liberty or give me death!” (Not from the Bible)
- “The love of money is the root of all evil.” (From the Bible, 1 Tim. 6:10, REB)
- “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (From the Bible, said by Jesus in Matt. 22:39)
- “A stitch in time saves nine.” (Not from the Bible)
- “Only the good die young.” (Not from the Bible)
- “Those who respect and honor their parents will have long life.” (From the Bible, adapted from Sir. 3:6)
- “A time to love, and a time to hate; / a time for war, and a time for peace.” (From the Bible, Eccles. 3:8)

For step B. If you know that the members of your group enjoy sharing, invite them to spend a few minutes discussing the following questions in small groups:

- What previous experiences have you had studying the Bible? How do you feel about those experiences?
- Does your family ever use the Bible? If so, when and how?
- What personal experiences have you had reading or studying the Bible?
- What does the Bible mean to you? What questions do you have about it?

You may need to borrow time from one of the other steps for this discussion. If so, consider abbreviating step D.



For step C. If you wish to give each participant a Bible as a gift, consider doing so as part of the distribution of participant Bibles in part 5 of this step.

For step D. If members of your group have little or no experience with the Bible, you may wish to substitute the material from step F of session 1 in the Horizons Program core course *Jesus: His Message and Mission* for the presentation and Bible search in this step.

For step D. If the young people in your group are quite familiar with the Bible's structure, skip the presentation in the first part of this step. Instead, ask them to look up and discuss all eight passages listed in the second part of the step.

For step F. Invite the young people on a quick tour of some of the literary forms contained in the Bible. Ask them to locate in their Bible some of the books in the left-hand column of the list below, and challenge them to guess the literary form of each book. The column on the right offers the correct answers. You may want to list the books on a sheet of newsprint, and then write the name of the literary form beside each as the young people identify it.

<i>Book of the Bible</i>	<i>Literary form</i>
Deuteronomy	Law
Job	Debate
Psalms	Poetry, song
Proverbs	Advice
Song of Songs	Love poetry
Jonah	Humorous fiction
Romans	Letter

For step G. If your meeting space is small, the noise from several small groups reading the same material aloud with slightly different timing may become distracting. If this is a concern, consider leading the opening prayer and Scripture reading of the Bible study on handout 1–A with the large group. Then ask the participants to form small groups for the discussion questions, background and commentary, and more discussion questions. Also consider reading the Book of Jonah to the group yourself, instead of having the participants take turns reading it, to ensure that it is clearly presented.

Closing Prayer and Evaluation

Before doing the closing teacher prayer, you may want to complete the evaluation at the end of this session.



Closing Teacher Prayer

After you have finished this session, take a few minutes to reflect on the following psalm:

Psalm 121 (The Lord, My Guardian)

I raise my eyes toward the mountains.
From where will my help come?
My help comes from the LORD,
the maker of heaven and earth.

God will not allow your foot to slip;
your guardian does not sleep.
Truly, the guardian of Israel
never slumbers nor sleeps.

The LORD is your guardian;
the LORD is your shade
at your right hand.

By day the sun cannot harm you,
nor the moon by night.

The LORD will guard you from all evil,
will always guard your life.

The LORD will guard your coming and going,
both now and forever.

(NAB)

Close your prayer time with the following words or words of your own:

Thank you, Lord, for being my guardian. May these young people be nourished through your holy word to accept your protection from all that is evil. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.



Evaluation

After the session take a few moments to evaluate how it went. Think about the following questions and, for future reference, write your answers in the spaces provided. If you are working with other adults, you may want to meet with them to discuss the results of your individual evaluations.

1. What were the things that worked best in this session?

2. What would make this session better next time?

3. How well did the session meet the objective of reviewing with the young people basic Bible information and skills?

Poorly ↔ Wonderfully
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Comments:

4. How well did the session meet the objective of enabling them to identify and appreciate various literary forms in the Bible?

Poorly ↔ Wonderfully
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Comments:

5. Did the content and methods in the session seem appropriate given the participants' familiarity with the Bible? If not, how might you adjust them next time?

6. Did you see anyone having a hard time in the group, or recognize any particular needs of the young people that you would like to bring to God?

Bible Installation

OUTLINE

1. Introduction

- Gather the group in the prayer space.
- Recruit two volunteers.
- Review the order of the ritual with the group.

2. Opening prayer

- Begin with reflective music (optional) and light the candle in the prayer space.
- Allow 30 seconds or so of silent reflection.
- Signal the first volunteer to bring the class Bible up front and to say, "Praise be to God for giving us this holy word."
- Lead the group in responding, aloud and with gestures, "May God's word be in my thoughts, on my lips, and in my heart."
- Ask the volunteer to place the class Bible on the table.

3. Scripture reading

- Direct the second volunteer to proclaim the Scripture reading.
- When the reader is finished, instruct him or her to say, "The word of the Lord."
- Lead the group in responding, "Thanks be to God."

4. Scripture reflection

- Offer a short reflection on the Scripture reading. (A participant may do this in sessions 2 to 5.)

5. Distribution of participant Bibles (session 1 only)

- Pass out individual Bibles to the young people, saying to each person, "[Participant's name], may God's word inspire you to live the Good News," and instructing that person to respond "Amen."

6. Closing prayer

- Lead the group in reciting the closing prayer, using one of these three methods:
 - Divide the group in half and instruct the halves to alternate reading the verses.
 - Ask a different person to read each verse.
 - Invite the participants to read the entire passage together as a group.

A BIBLE STUDY ON THE

Book of Jonah

Opening Prayer

In your small group, read the following aloud together:

Dear God, send us your Spirit to open us to your word of life. Illumine our mind and heart that we might always grow in our understanding of your word and its meaning for our life. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Scripture Reading

Open to the Book of Jonah in your Bible. In your small group, read the whole book out loud in turns, changing readers at least every chapter. Do not read any introduction, headers that divide the story, or notes. Listen carefully to the story and try to picture it unfolding in your mind.

Discussion Questions

Discuss the following questions in your group:

- Was Jonah an eager or reluctant prophet? How can you tell?
- During the storm, who showed more respect for Yahweh, the pagan sailors or Jonah?
- Jonah hoped the people of Nineveh would react in what way to his message of doom? How did they react? How did Jonah respond to their reaction?
- Think of this as an actual, historical story about real people. What questions do you have about the story? What is the central message of the story?

Background and Commentary

Read the following material to yourself. When everyone in your small group is finished, move on to the next set of discussion questions.

A key to understanding the message of the Book of Jonah is knowing its literary form. Catholic scholars agree that Jonah is a work of *didactic fiction*. That is, Jonah is an imaginative story intended to teach a point. How do the scholars know it is fiction? Several things give clues. First, although the book starts like other books about prophets, it quickly

becomes clear that Jonah is not like other prophets. Other prophets show reluctance to answer God’s call because they feel unworthy or are afraid of the danger they will be in. Jonah runs away because he is afraid that he might be successful! (See Jonah 4:2.)

Also, other prophets are sent to give their message to the Hebrew people. Jonah is sent to a great enemy of the Hebrew people. We know that the Ninevites did not become followers of Yahweh or change into a peaceful people. In real life, at best Jonah would not have been listened to, and at worst he would have been killed.

Finally, several humorous elements suggest that we are reading about not an actual, historical prophet but rather a parody of one. The scenes where Jonah gets the short straw, Jonah spends time in the belly of a giant fish, the king orders that not only the people but all the



animals will wear sackcloth (can you imagine trying to put pigs in sackcloth?), and God gives Jonah a shade bush and then sends a worm to



eat it would have seemed to the people of the author’s time so ludicrous that they would have been chuckling all the way through the story.

To understand this story fully, we must keep in mind one other piece of cultural background. At the time this was written, Israel was experiencing a nationalistic fury to the point where men who had married a foreign woman were told to leave her and their children. This is an ongoing theme through much of the history of the Hebrew people—that God loved the Hebrews alone of all people on the earth. All other nations were God’s enemies and therefore Israel’s enemies as well.

More Discussion Questions

- Jonah was so upset by the apparent unfairness in God’s sparing wicked Nineveh but killing his little bush that he wanted to die. Why was Jonah disappointed that God did not destroy Nineveh? How would a reader from the time this was written have related to Jonah?
- What is the author of Jonah teaching about how God wants the Israelites to treat other nations? (See Jonah 4:10–11.) Why did the author use humor to help get this point across? Would Jesus agree with the author’s viewpoint?
- How are we tempted today to believe that God prefers some nations over other nations? some people over other people?
- What symbolism might the early Christians have seen in the three days and nights Jonah spent in the belly of the fish?

Session 2 Scripture Reflection

The following steps are intended to help you prepare for the reflection you have volunteered to give during the Bible installation in the next session. The reflection need not be profound or formal. Just share some background on the Scripture reading and a few of your personal thoughts about it. Keep it short and simple, only a couple of minutes long. Thanks for your willingness to help!

Step 1: Read the following passage prayerfully. Underline or circle any words or phrases that stand out to you. Then write your response to the question following the passage.

In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God.
He was in the beginning with God.
All things came to be through him,
and without him nothing came to be.
What came to be through him was life,
and this life was the light of the human
race;
the light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness has not overcome it.
(Verses 1–5)

And the Word became flesh
and made his dwelling among us,
and we saw his glory,
the glory as of the Father’s only Son,
full of grace and truth.
(John 1:14, NAB)

- What things about the passage struck you as you read it? Did anything in it make you wonder or feel perplexed? Did anything make you want to thank and praise God?

Step 2: Read the following commentary on the passage. Then write your response to the two questions following the commentary.

This reading is from the very beginning of the Gospel of John. Scripture scholars believe that it was originally a separate poem about Jesus Christ that the author then used as a prologue

to the Gospel. The Word is Jesus Christ, and the passage recognizes that Christ existed before his physical birth on earth, that he existed with God before creation itself.

The passage indicates that within creation exists a struggle between light and darkness, good and evil. Christ, the Word, will overcome the darkness. Evil will not triumph. Not only that, but Christ becomes flesh, human like us, so that we can directly experience God’s truth and glory. What an amazing, awesome thing, that God, creator of the universe, would take on human flesh. By including this poetic prologue, the author of the Gospel of John was trying to say: “Pay attention to what’s in this book! It tells the story of a miraculous happening, God’s becoming human and living among us!”

- What key points do you want to share with the group about the background of this passage? What basic message was the author trying to communicate?
- The author of the Gospel of John used this passage to call attention to the importance of Jesus Christ and this Gospel. Why is it important for young people today to know about the Bible? Why should they read the Bible?

Step 3: Organize your reflections on the passage.

Consider sharing ideas on the following points:

- what struck you initially about the passage
- what the original author intended to teach the reader
- what the original author’s intention might mean to young people today

Note that your responses to the questions in the first two steps provide the information you need to make these central points. If you wish, use the back of this paper to outline your reflection.

