

SHARING SCRIPTURE WITH THE YOUNG

by Laurie Manhardt

Fifty years ago, a five-year-old public school student in the United States would recite with the teacher, “God is great; God is good. Let us thank Him for this food,” before having a snack of graham crackers and milk. Some years later this same child might memorize Psalm 23 in English class. Today, of course, the situation has changed, and many children in our society grow up biblically illiterate and strangers to God.

Catholic parents face a dual challenge. First the parent must transmit the truths of the faith to the child. Next, all Christians are commissioned by Jesus to share the Good News with those around them. How can you do that? One way to meet both objec-

tives is through home, neighborhood, or parish Bible studies. Children’s ability in memorizing makes them excellent candidates for Scripture study even at very young ages. Indeed, preschool children can often memorize Sacred Scripture better than adults and can store away God’s Word in their little hearts from childhood, which they can draw from later in life.

What are some possibilities that might work in your situation?

1. Family Night Bible Study—Choose one night of the week and set aside an hour or so for the study of Sacred Scripture. Choose a book of the Bible to study, or read the readings for the following Sunday. Read

the Scriptures aloud, ask questions, and discuss. Act out Bible stories in skits, sing songs, or make crafts with young children, illustrating the passage studied.

2. Home Group Study—Invite another family or two to your home to do a Bible study from a text that you have chosen in advance. Select a study that meets with your time constraints and the level of difficulty that you can handle.

3. Neighborhood Bible Study—Mothers with preschool-aged children can gather one morning a week in such a way that the mothers can do adult Bible study, while someone teaches the children. You might hire a babysitter for very young children, take turns teaching and minding the children, or meet after school when high school students are available to help.

4. Teen Bible Study—Invite young adults to embark on an adult Bible Study. God called the prophet Daniel, King David, the Virgin Mary, and the Apostle John to serve Him when they were quite young, perhaps teenagers. God still works in the lives of young people. The study of God’s Word and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* can help adolescents learn where to find answers to many of the challenging questions that they will encounter.



5. **Parish Bible Study**—Successful home groups and neighborhood Bible Studies often become so fruitful and successful that there are too many people to fit into one home. In that case, go to your pastor and ask to use the parish hall or church basement for Bible study. Bring the materials that you are using, and make sure that the materials have an *imprimatur* and *nihil obstat* on the inside of the front page, showing that a Catholic bishop has approved the materials and finds nothing objectionable or contrary to the Catholic Church's teaching.

Why study the Bible? If God took all the trouble to inspire the writers of the Bible, it behooves us to take the time to read and study what they wrote. As well as communicating God's love for His children, the Bible also gives us commands and directives. You will also encounter rich history, beautiful poetry, exciting drama, scheming and treachery, love stories, betrayals, parables, and rich literature. Who would not want to be familiar with the most widely read book in human history?

What if you aren't equipped? Perhaps God isn't as concerned with one's ability as with one's availability. Waiting until you are well-versed in the Bible and find the perfect materials may be a smoke screen that can paralyze a Catholic into doing nothing. There have been many parents who have taken the attitude, "Let Sister do it. Let Father do it." God doesn't want Catholics to be passive, but plans to equip lay people to study His Word and share it with others.

What if you come across a question you can't answer? Offering your time and talent to God by organizing a home or neighborhood Bible study doesn't mean you have to be a biblical scholar or an expert in Scripture. No human being, not even a biblical scholar, can have all the answers. Much of what the Bible shows us is mystery. When a question comes up that can't be answered, simply acknowledge the truth. "I don't know. But I'll do some research. I'll ask Father, and I'll get back to you next week."

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How do you find the Bible study that works for you? Go to a Catholic bookstore and look at the materials that are available. If you have Internet access, go online and look at the publications offered by reputable Catholic publishers. Ask friends if they have done a Catholic Bible study and if they would recommend the materials. Consider a needs analysis carefully. What is the reading level of your group? A family Bible study should be simpler and have fewer questions than a Bible study for persons who have a higher reading level or more time.

How do you get started? Pray to the Holy Spirit. Ask God for direction on what to study, with whom to study, when to study, and how to study. Get together with someone to pray and seek God. Wait on God for some inspiration or prompting. Obey. Do whatever He tells you. Be faithful and expect God to bring good fruit from your efforts. You may not see results right away, but trust that God is always working, especially in the lives of children, even if it isn't immediately obvious.

What are some results of Bible study? Once I asked a young mother in a Bible study what Mass she attended. She replied that she didn't go to Mass, but simply took the children to CCD. When I asked why she did that, she explained that *that* was what her parents had done with her. Since her parents sent her to CCD, but didn't in fact attend Mass themselves, she thought that was the norm. When she learned that Catholics are expected to worship God at Mass on Sundays, she started attending Mass with her children and ultimately enrolled them in the parish school.

Johnny, a little four-year-old, came to our large parish Bible study with

his mother. A volunteer worked with the children, teaching them and making crafts while the mothers did their Bible study in different rooms in the parish center. One day, Johnny made a replica of baby Jesus out of a toilet tissue roll and construction paper. Proudly he took his craft home and explained the story of baby Jesus to his daddy, his grandparents, a cleaning woman, and anyone else who would listen. When his wild and foot-loose uncle came home from college for Christmas, Johnny proudly showed his craft to his uncle, saying, "I made this to look like baby Jesus, Uncle Mike. He came to die for my sins and yours. I love Jesus. You love Jesus, too, don't you, Uncle Mike?" Bible study can help to make a four-year-old an evangelist and missionary.

One women's group in our parish Bible study came across a question concerning the confession of sins. One woman reluctantly shared that she hadn't been to Confession in ten years! Another woman confided that she hadn't celebrated the Sacrament of Reconciliation in more than 20 years! And a third woman admitted that she hadn't been to Confession in so long that she wouldn't know what to do.

The leader of the small group quickly responded, "Yes you would, and we'll help you. We're all going to Confession this Saturday, and we will pray for you while you confess your sins to the priest." That Saturday morning, three women who hadn't experienced the grace of the Sacrament of Reconciliation in decades tasted the mercy of God. Just because some lay women were available to God and agreed to help lead a Bible study, people were reconciled with God and His Church.

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While God can and does use many ways to minister to His people, the Bible continues to be an indispensable means of bringing people closer to God. The Bible is a priceless treasure for all people—children, teens, adults, and the elderly. One man in our parish Bible study said, “I’m a cradle Catholic, and I stayed in the cradle for 50 years. I’m just now learning the richness of our faith!” Perhaps the best encouragement we can give one another is from the old commercial: “Just Do It.” Get a Catholic Bible. Pray for someone to study with and find some Bible study materials that look interesting and manageable to you. And then, with God’s grace, “Just Do It.” ■

Laurie Manhardt writes from Spring Lake, NJ. She coauthored the “Come and See” series, which includes Prophets and Apostles and The Gospel of John, available through Emmaus Road Publishing. To order a copy, call toll-free (800) 398-5470 or visit www.emmausroad.org. For more information on starting a Bible study, call CUF’s Catholic hotline at (800) MY FAITH.

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Catholic Quiz

Answers from page 31

1. (c) *General Directory for Catechesis* (GCD), no. 7
2. (c) GCD, no. 58
3. (a) GCD, no. 92
4. (d) GCD, no. 98
5. (b) GCD, no. 104
6. (c) GCD, no. 124
7. (c) GCD, no. 154
8. (d) GCD, no. 185
9. (c) GCD, nos. 226-27
10. (d) GCD, no. 263

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