

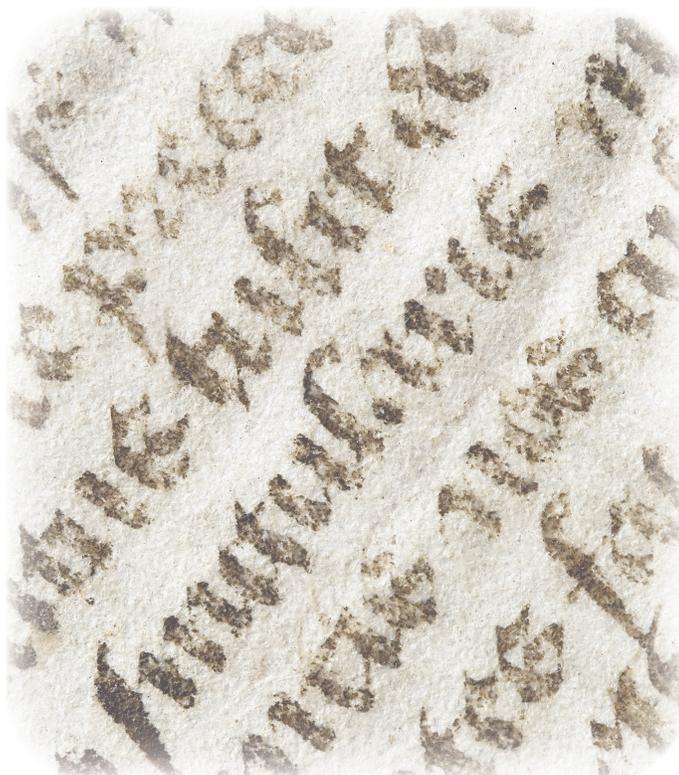


LEADER GUIDE

THE CREED
SESSION 3



 SYMBOLON



THE
BIBLE

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SESSION OVERVIEW

The Bible. It is inarguably the most widely read book of all time. Virtually everyone knows what a Bible is, even those who have never read a word of it. If you ask those people what it contains, they might say that it is full of a lot of rules and moral teaching, and maybe some stories they learned as children, like Adam and Eve and Noah’s Ark.

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

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

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

In this session we will discuss God’s love letter to humanity—the Bible—and how it was inspired by the Holy Spirit to initiate conversation with us.

SESSION SNAPSHOT

Review the entire lesson plan in advance so you are prepared to lead and discuss comfortably. Gather necessary supplies and review video segments prior to your gathering. Use the time allotments in the session outline below as a guideline, as the length of time spent on each section will vary from group to group.

TIME	SECTION	SECTION OVERVIEW
15 minutes	CONNECT	Lead your group in a personal story-sharing activity; then introduce the topic and open in prayer.
60 minutes	DISCUSS	Watch and discuss these video segments. Scene 1: The Sword of the Spirit Scene 2: The History of the Bible—the Canon Scene 3: Scripture is Inspired Scene 4: Read and Study the Bible
15 minutes	COMMIT	Participants review the key points and make a commitment to preview the week’s Scripture readings and reflect on how God is speaking to them. Close in prayer.

SUPPLIES NEEDED

- » Media device to show video segments
- » A Bible
- » Participant Sheets
- » Playing cards with Jacks, Queens, Kings, and Aces separated out of the deck

PREPARE IN ADVANCE

- » Have snacks ready.
- » Create a welcoming environment.



LEADER TIPS

- » We often include possible responses and material from the *Catechism* after the discussion questions to help you facilitate the conversation. It is best to let group members respond first and share the concepts in parentheses only as needed.
- » *Disciple* comes from the word *discipline*. So to be a disciple is to develop the disciplines of your rabbi. An easy way to remember these disciplines is to call them H.A.B.I.T.S.—the habits of the saints. Introduce and regularly review this acronym in each session:
 - H – Holy hour: Start with 10 minutes of daily prayer and watch it grow over time to an hour.
 - A – Accountability: Be transparent with at least one friend who will hold you accountable to being a disciple.
 - B – Bible prayer and study: Let God’s Word transform your mind and connect you to Jesus in prayer.
 - I – Invest in your parish: Tithe and serve in the mission of the parish.
 - T – Tell: Boldly tell others about your faith and invite them to faith in Jesus.
 - S – Sacraments: Participate as frequently as you can.

During the Commit section of each session, you’ll ask participants: “How are your spiritual H.A.B.I.T.S. coming along?” This is a great opportunity to talk about any joys or struggles that individuals in the group may be experiencing as they grow in the habits of the saints.



CONNECT



ACTIVITY

MY JOURNEY

SAY: I have some playing cards in my hand. I only have Jacks, Queens, Kings, and Aces. I am going to have each of you draw a card. If you select a Jack, you get to share a memorable story from your childhood before you went to school. If you draw a Queen, you get to share a memorable story from your elementary school days. If you draw a King, you get to share a memorable story from your middle school years. And finally, if you draw an Ace, you get to share a memorable story from high school.

Allow each participant an opportunity to share at least once; twice if time allows. Then move to the Introduction.



INTRODUCTION

SAY: Thank you for sharing your stories. Did you know that the Bible is also your story? Within its 73 books, the Bible outlines God's plan for salvation, starting with Creation; moving through His interaction with His chosen people, Israel; and finally culminating with the story of how His Son, Jesus, entered into time and established a New Covenant in the Church—the People of God. That's you!

In the Bible, God reaches out to us and seeks to initiate a conversation with us. When you think about it, it's astonishing that God wants to lovingly talk with each of us about our lives. Today we'll discuss how that happens. But first let's open in prayer.



OPENING PRAYER

PRAY: *O Lord Jesus Christ, open the eyes of my heart, that I may hear Your Word and understand and do Your will, for I am a sojourner upon the earth. Hide not Your commandments from me, but open my eyes, that I may perceive the wonders of Your law.*



"Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."

—Psalm 119:105



DISCUSS

SAY: Let's watch the first scene of this session.



Watch the first video segment. The video will last about 3 minutes. At the end of the segment, discuss.

SAY: St. Jerome said, "Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ." If we don't know and understand the Scriptures and the story of Salvation, we don't understand and know Jesus.

» Well-known comedian Jim Gaffigan jokes: "I don't know much about the Bible myself... because I haven't read it...because I don't have to...because I'm Catholic!" This is funny because there is some truth to this statement. Why do you think Catholics do not read and know the Bible as much as Protestant Christians?

(Catholics and Protestants use the Bible in different ways. Protestants believe that the Bible is the only authoritative Word of God. Therefore, they only look to the Bible for doctrine and moral teachings. Catholics, on the other hand, look to the Church, as they believe Sacred Scripture needs to be properly interpreted. Protestants study Scripture, memorize Scripture, and pray with Scripture, and that is good. Catholics need to do more of this. However, for Catholics the Bible is not so much a book to be studied as a book to worship with. In fact, the Catholic Mass is almost 30 percent Sacred Scripture. The readings (Old Testament, New Testament, and Gospel) and the psalms, of course, but also the responses, the liturgy of the Eucharist, and the prayers are almost all from Scripture. Finally, over the course of three years, a Catholic attending Mass will hear almost all of the Bible read.

Worship is the privileged place for the reading of Sacred Scripture. However, the Church strongly encourages us to frequently read, pray, and study Scripture. "The Church 'forcefully and specifically exhorts all the Christian faithful ... to learn 'the surpassing knowledge of Jesus Christ,' by frequent reading of the divine Scriptures" [CCC 133].)

- » St. Paul referred to the Word of God as “the Sword of the Spirit” (Ephesians 6:17). In what ways is the Bible a weapon?

(A sword is a weapon for battle. Jesus warns us that we are in a battle with Satan: “He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies” [John 8:44]. The sword of the Spirit will form our hearts and minds in the truth so we can effectively resist the deceptions of the devil. St. Paul tells us to “not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” [Romans 12:2]. God’s Word will renew our minds and transform our lives.)

SAY: Let’s continue with Scene 2.



Watch the second video segment. The video will last about 6 minutes. At the end of the segment, discuss.

SAY: St. John, when referencing the Word of God, seems to suggest that it is alive when he says, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”

- » Why do you think that the books in the New Testament had to be Apostolic? What does Apostolic mean?

(Apostolic in this context means the book was written by an apostle or one of the apostles immediate disciples. If a book was apostolic it would be connected to Jesus because the apostles were direct followers of Jesus. They spent time with him and knew what he taught and did.)

Open the table of contents in your Bibles and see if you can locate the different parts of Scripture. (Old Testament: the Pentateuch, Historical Books, Wisdom Literature, and the Prophets) (New Testament: Gospels, Acts of the Apostles, Pauline Epistles, Catholic Epistles, Revelation).

- » “The Church suppressed a fifth ‘lost gospel’—the Gospel of Thomas—because it contradicted Church teaching.

(There have been some books and movies that use the Gospel of Thomas in order to create conspiracy and present the Church as evil. In reality, the Gospel of Thomas is one of the gnostic gospels, written nearly two centuries after Jesus had lived by someone who did not even know Jesus, not the Apostle Thomas. The gnostic gospels come from a sect of people whose beliefs about God departed from the orthodox Christian teaching of the early Church. For example, for them Jesus was not necessarily human and the way of salvation is not through His death and resurrection. As you can see, this belief rejects the very foundation of Christianity. Therefore, the Church rightly did not include the Gospel of Thomas in the Bible.)

SAY: Let's continue with Scene 3.



Watch the third video segment. The video will last about 11 minutes. At the end of the segment, discuss.

SAY: This segment went into the historical nature of the Bible and how it was composed. It is important to know and understand the history of the Bible so that we can understand that it is trustworthy. So much of what we know and understand about our faith and the historical story of Jesus is found in the Bible. Those who seek to discredit the Bible seek to undermine our faith.

How would you respond to the following statements?

» "The Bible is not reliable. It is full of contradictions."

(Actually, the Bible is the most reliable, when it comes to the accuracy of the text, of all the works of classical antiquity. For example, the earliest manuscript of Virgil that we now possess was written some 350 years after his death. But in the case of the New Testament, we have parts of manuscripts dating from the first and early second centuries, only a few decades after the works were written. In addition, there are far more biblical manuscripts than those of classical authors—literally thousands of manuscripts in Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Coptic, Syriac, and other languages. Furthermore, there is an astounding amount of archeological evidence that supports the historicity of the Bible. As far as contradictions in the Bible, we must remember that the Bible was written by approximately 40 different authors over a period of 1,500 years. Each writer wrote from a different perspective, with a different style, to a different audience, for a different purpose, so we should expect some minor differences. However, the differences are not irreconcilable. For example, Matthew tells us that Jesus went up on the mountain and preached the Sermon on the Mount [Matthew 5:1]. But Luke tells us Jesus gave this sermon on a plain [Luke 6:17]. In reality, Jesus gave this sermon in many places and the authors are picking a specific place to emphasize a point. Matthew, who was writing to a Jewish audience, wanted to emphasize that Jesus is the new Moses delivering a new law on a new mountain, similar to how Moses gave the law to the Israelites from Mount Sinai.)

» "The Bible is not 'God's Word' because it was written by human authors."

(Catholics believe the Bible is inspired by God because Jesus gave the Holy Spirit to the Church to teach the truth and the Church teaches that the Bible is inspired. It is true that the Bible claims to be inspired: "All scripture is inspired by God" [2 Tim 3:16], but just because it claims to be doesn't mean it is so. There are other religions whose sacred texts claim to be inspired. The Catechism states: "To compose the sacred books, God chose certain men who, all the while he employed them in this task, made full use of their own faculties and powers so that, though he acted in them and by them, it was as true authors that they consigned to writing whatever he wanted written, and no more" [106]. Just as the Holy Spirit came upon Mary and the "Word of God" was conceived in her womb, so the Holy Spirit can inspire human authors to write the "Word of God.")

- » «The Church suppressed a fifth ‘lost gospel’—the Gospel of Thomas—because it contradicted Church teaching.

(There have been some books and movies that use the Gospel of Thomas in order to create conspiracy and present the Church as evil. In reality, the Gospel of Thomas is one of the gnostic gospels, written nearly two centuries after Jesus had lived by someone who did not even know Jesus, not the Apostle Thomas. The gnostic gospels come from a sect of people whose beliefs about God departed from the orthodox Christian teaching of the early Church. For example, for them Jesus was not necessarily human and the way of salvation is not through His death and resurrection. As you can see, this belief rejects the very foundation of Christianity. Therefore, the Church rightly did not include the Gospel of Thomas in the Bible.)

- » «The Church added books to the Bible in order to support false teachings like purgatory and praying for the deceased.”

(In fact, the Catholic Church did not add books to the Bible, but rather Protestant leaders removed them. The seven books in question—Tobit, Judith, 1 and 2 Maccabees, Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, and Baruch—are properly called the deuterocanonical books and not Apocrypha. Because the Protestant leaders rejected the teachings of purgatory and praying for the deceased, which is affirmed in 2 Maccabees 12, they wanted to eliminate these books. But these seven books were part of the Septuagint—the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures—and this is the translation that was used by Paul, the Apostles, and the early Church.)

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

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

SAY: Let’s continue with Scene 4.



Watch the fourth video segment. The video will last about 1 minute. At the end of the segment, discuss.

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

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



COMMIT



ACTIVITY

TAKE-AWAY

SAY: I am going to go around the circle, starting with the person on my right, and I'd like each of us to share something we remember that this person said tonight.

Take a minute and go around the group, asking everyone to share briefly. Then continue.

Now I want to go around the circle again, this time starting with the person on my left, and I'd like each of us to share one take-away from tonight. In other words, share something that resonates in your heart as a truth to live by.

Give everyone time to share, and then continue.

SAY: How are your spiritual H.A.B.I.T.S. coming along?

Encourage your group to share how they have grown spiritually since your last meeting by practicing spiritual H.A.B.I.T.S. Ask them if there is any way you can help them in their commitment to developing spiritual H.A.B.I.T.S. After everyone has shared, follow up on last week's commitments before discussing the new commitment.

SAY: This week's commitment is to look up the Scripture readings for the upcoming Sunday Mass. You can find them at: usccb.org/bible/readings. Spend some time reflecting on how God, through the Scripture readings, is speaking to your head, heart, and hands. What is it telling you intellectually? What is it conveying to you personally? What action is it prompting you toward?



CLOSING PRAYER

Answer any questions about the take-home commitment. Then close in prayer.

PRAY: Lord, we thank You for this time together to help us understand how Your Word is alive and active. Help us to grow in appreciation, awareness, and understanding of the Bible. Give us the desire to grow closer to You and to be in conversation with You throughout each day. Amen.