

Conducting a Bible Workshop for Young People (Middle and High School Students)

This workshop can be accomplished in ninety minutes and requires one adult for every twelve to fifteen children. It may also be adapted for teens and adults. The workshop requires that all participants have the same version of a Catholic Bible on hand so that page numbers can be used to locate passages quickly. It also requires that each participant have a set of the Bible bookmarks (see pages 125–131) and a pair of scissors.

Goal: To build participants' familiarity and comfort with the structure of the Bible and to increase the ease with which participants locate books, chapters, verses, and famous stories/figures in the Bible.

Learning Outcomes: Participants will learn to quickly locate biblical books, chapters, and verses using the table of contents. Likewise, participants will learn to quickly identify the location of famous stories and figures by using the *Bible Blueprint* bookmarks.

Action Plan:

1. Be sure all participants have the same version of a Catholic Bible, preferably the New American Bible.
2. Begin by introducing the notion of how important the Bible is to us as Christians and how we are going to learn more about the Bible in this session. Ask how many have heard of the following stories (raise hands):
 - David and Goliath
 - Noah's ark
 - Jonah and the large fish
 - Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane
3. Next, tell participants that you will offer a prize (e.g., \$1 or \$5) to the first person who can find one of these stories in the Bible in 60 seconds or less. Use a stopwatch (and a whistle) and give 60 seconds for each of

the four stories listed above, one at a time (without adult assistance). Most likely, no one will be able to do so. (If you believe your audience is more astute than this, be sure to allow only 30–45 seconds lest you go broke!)

Point out how unfortunate it is that we know about these stories but we don't know how to find them in the Bible. Explain that we will be working on that in this workshop.

Next, tell participants to have their Bible ready. Write the following biblical citations on the board (be sure to use abbreviations):

Ez 12:6–8

Jb 2:3–11

1 Thes 5:2–4

Again, allow participants 30–60 seconds to locate these passages (again, without adult assistance). Most will be unable to do so in the time allotted. Point out once again how unfortunate it is that we seem to be unable to identify Bible passages by their abbreviations. Ask if anyone can say out loud what the above abbreviations stand for.

4. Explain that if the Bible is so important to us, then we are going to need to learn how to find things in it more quickly and with more confidence. Explain that the Bible is not really a book but is a library—God's Library.
5. Explain that when you go to a library, you need to use the catalog and the book numbering system to locate the book you want to read. Point out how God's Library, the Bible, has a "catalog," too, namely, the table of contents. Have all participants open their Bible to the table of contents section at the beginning. Adult supervisors should assist children here. Point out the alphabetical index, the abbreviation page, and other highlights of the table of contents in your version of the Bible.
6. Using the table of contents, invite participants to tell you what page the following books begin on:

Deuteronomy

Judges

Esther

Luke

Next, using the abbreviation table, ask participants to identify which book you are referring to when you write on the board:

Hb

Na

Ti

7. Using the board, point out how book, chapter, and verse are used in biblical citation:

Title of Book (abbreviated) Chapter: Verse(s)

Invite several participants to go to the board with their Bible open to the abbreviation table and write out in biblical citation the following passages as you say them:

Ecclesiastes, chapter 9, verses 1–8 (Answer: Eccl 9:1–8)

Second Letter of Paul to Timothy, chapter 2, verses 4–6
(Answer: 2 Tim 2:4–6)

(Select more, if you wish, depending on the size of your crowd, how quickly they are catching on, and how much time you have left.)

Once again, Scripture citation may be handled differently than what I've shown above, depending on which Bible you are using. While most Bibles use the system I've described, don't be surprised to find that some Bibles use a period or a comma instead of a colon to indicate the difference between chapter and verse. For example, the Scripture citation for the Gospel of John, chapter 3, verse 16 may appear in any of the following ways, depending upon which Bible you are using: Jn 3:16; Jn 3, 16; or Jn 3.16. Be sure everyone is "on the same page" with your approach to Scripture citation before you move on.

8. Now, explain how to find famous stories and passages when we don't know what book, chapter, and verse they are in. Use the concept of God's Library again and draw a diagram on a chalkboard (see diagram from page 3 in chapter 1). Imagine a building divided into two parts: Old Testament and New Testament. Ask how we differentiate between these two. (Answer: The Old Testament has stories about the people of Israel before Jesus, the New Testament has stories about Jesus and the Christian Church.)

Invite all participants to locate the place in the Bible where the Old Testament ends and the New Testament begins. Show how much

larger the Old Testament is than the New Testament. Ask participants what section they should be in if they are going to look for a story about Jesus.

9. Explain that in addition to breaking down the Bible into two large sections, we are now going to break it down into eight smaller sections, four in each testament. Distribute to each participant a set of Bible bookmarks (see pages 125–131) and a pair of scissors. (You may wish to have the bookmarks cut out ahead of time to avoid use of scissors and to reduce the time spent cutting.)
10. Beginning with the Old Testament, identify the four sections: Pentateuch, History, Wisdom, Prophets. Have participants cut out and place one bookmark at a time in their Bibles, beginning with Pentateuch. Explain what can be found in this section by using the information provided on the bookmark. Have participants find the first and last page of each section, list the books included in this section, and insert the bookmark at the end of the section. For example, the Pentateuch bookmark goes on the last page of Deuteronomy. Invite the participants to hold up the Pentateuch section alone (take the section between the thumb and index finger) to observe its length. Using the bookmark, point out what stories/people can be found in this section. Invite participants to locate a few. Do the same for each of the four sections of the Old Testament.
11. Do the same with each of the four sections of the New Testament: Gospels, Acts, Letters, Revelation. Point out that while Acts and Revelation are individual books and not really “sections,” it is easier to separate them this way. Continue cutting out and inserting bookmarks one section at a time as you give a brief overview of what can be found in each section. Encourage participants to locate some stories as you talk about them. Spend extra time pointing out the Gospel section. Ask participants to hold up the section from Matthew through John: emphasize that if you want to find a Jesus story, this is where to look. Remember that all of the information you need is on the bookmarks.

12. Once all the bookmarks have been inserted, continue drilling participants as time allows, locating famous stories and figures in the Bible from the information provided on the bookmarks. Award prizes (candy, etc.) for just being in the right section (e.g., Pentateuch, Letters).
13. Encourage participants to continue quizzing themselves at home until they can remove the bookmarks as they would training wheels—when they are able to locate famous stories and figures within just a few minutes by knowing which section to look for. Encourage participants to show their parents, friends, pastor, etc., how they have learned to find their way around the Bible with such ease and familiarity.



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