

# Chapter

## 6

# What About the Bible?

## The Bible and Youth Ministry

As Christians we are people of a specific book: the Bible. As Christians we believe that the Bible reveals a living God whom we know in Jesus Christ. We believe Jesus Christ is the living Word of God, and to know the living Word of God, we must know the Bible.

Scripture lies at the heart of United Methodist youth ministry. This sacred book confronts us with what it means to be God's people; provides guidelines for living responsibly in our world community; and is the essential resource for whatever we do through the church. Biblical understanding through study is the lifelong journey all Christians are on.

The Bible includes many different types of writings: poetry, letters, laws, histories, wisdom sayings, and more. While the Bible is a diverse book, it has a unity because of the story it tells. The Old Testament tells the story of the encounter between God and the Hebrew people in the events of their history. The New Testament is based on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, the new covenant between the people and God. It includes a history of the early Christian church as it became the vehicle for spreading the news that all people could have a relationship with God.

Use the Bible in your youth ministry. This book is too important to be left on the shelf when planning discussions, worship, and reflection times after service projects and fellowship activities. Too often in youth ministry we think that the Bible belongs mainly in Sunday school and is not necessary in the other aspects of youth ministry. Don't make this mistake! Through Bible study, you will be offering a resource to youth that they will not be able to get in any other group to which they belong.

## Why So Many Kinds of Bibles?

The original texts of what we know as the Old Testament were written in Hebrew, while the New Testament was written in Greek. However, there are no existing original copies of these manuscripts. For example, we do not have the original letters that Paul wrote. In their place are thousands of slightly different manuscript fragments. These were written at different times, reflecting changes in use of language, each suggesting a reasonable, yet different, way of reading the Scriptures. This makes an accurate single translation problematic. After extensive research and careful study, a number of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek translations have been accepted by the scholastic community. These form the basis for the Bibles we read today, and they come in three categories.

### Verbal Translations

Scholars who translate ancient texts into word-for-word modern languages (or as close to it as possible) create what are called verbal translations. These texts are more concerned about translating the words themselves, rather than trying to convey what the words meant in the context and culture of the day in which they were written. Common versions that fit the verbal translation category are the King James Version, the New International Version, and the New Revised Standard Version.

### Interpretations Based on Early Ancient Texts (Dynamic Translations)

People wanted a Bible that non-Christians could understand with only a small degree of sacrifice of word-for-word accuracy. This meant a Bible that was still based on the ancient languages but translated into the everyday vernacular of regular people. Bibles in this grouping include the *Good News Bible: The Bible in Today's English Version* and the more recent *Contemporary English Version*.

### Interpretations Based on Other Modern Bibles (Paraphrase Translations)

These versions aren't based on those scholarly Greek, Aramaic, or Hebrew translations. This group of Bibles attempts to make a current

translation even more readable and understandable by paraphrasing the Bible into everyday street language. Notable Bibles from this category are *The Living Bible* and *The Message: The New Testament in Contemporary English*. Since paraphrase Bibles don't maintain a link to the Greek, Aramaic, or Hebrew translations, they cannot, nor were they designed to, support serious Bible study.

## Suggestions for Using the Bible With Youth

Offer a variety of Bible classes regularly, not just in short bursts or for special liturgical seasons. You have different kinds of youth, and they will require a variety of approaches as their spiritual and intellectual needs change and mature. The following suggestions represent a spectrum of possibilities that could be a regular part of your ongoing youth ministry.

### Get the Pastor Involved

Seek a time and a place for the pastor to actively teach the Bible to the youth—for instance, a specific weekend retreat, a six-week course, or any focused setting that puts the pastor in the role of Bible teacher with the youth.

### Offer a Variety of Times

Organize Bible classes for different days during the month or week, and for different time slots: mornings, evenings, and after school. Also stagger the length of the classes, offering some that are short (even as little as half an hour), some much longer, and some in between.

### Offer a Variety of Approaches

Structure opportunities to approach the Bible from different angles: Some groups might be grounded in factual investigation, while others might be based in sharing reflections and insights. And another might be based on looking at Scripture that relates to specific issues in the lives of teens.

### Encourage and Model Personal Bible Study

Don't let the demands of youth ministry lead to neglecting the need for your own regular personal Bible study. It's difficult to inspire youth to make Bible study a life habit if it isn't true for their leaders.

## How Do I Lead a Bible Study?

Bible studies can be done in dozens of different ways. Here are some examples.

### Read Through the Bible in One Year

This is a good way to get acquainted with the whole scope of the Bible. Getting a feeling for the whole Bible can make focusing on one section or one type of literature at a later time more relevant. There are several programs that offer guided reading programs for 365 days.

### Focus on Old Testament and/or New Testament Overviews

This is similar to reading the Bible from beginning to end, but usually takes less time and focuses on the big themes rather than on reading word for word. This is a good place to start for beginners.

### Focus on Parable or Story Studies

Spend time looking at the meaning of one incident. Ask questions such as: "Who wrote this? To whom? When? Why? What type of literature is it? What is the whole passage about? What was originally intended for the first hearers? What does it say to us today?"

### Roleplay Passages

Assign people to each character in a given story or incident. Let them act it out or read their own parts and discuss the feelings of each person. Encourage them to think about what others saw and heard or to share insights that might relate to the story. Most stories have many players, and each offers something significant.

### Interpret Anew; Update the Language

Rewrite a parable for a modern setting. What would the parable of the Good Samaritan sound like if Jesus appeared at the typical high school and was trying to make a point to the average teenager?

### Study by the Chapter or by the Book

Do a short-term study of one of the Gospels, one of Paul's letters, or a history book from the Old Testament. Ask similar questions to those listed under "Focus on Parable or Story Studies" (above).

### Focus on Word Studies

Look at every instance of a word, such as the word *spirit*, examining the context, the nuance, and the root of each of the uses. This is interesting work for those interested in more in-depth Bible study.

### Encourage Inductive Bible Studies

Use the following types of questions:

- Observation questions: requires facts in the response.
- Interpretation questions: requires analysis of the facts in a response.
- Application questions: requires displaying a personal grasp of the analysis in the response.

### Discuss the Sunday Sermon

Don't overlook the Sunday sermon and its scriptural foundation as a Bible study class. This is not to criticize or to recast the sermon, but to seek deeper meaning and relevance for daily life.

These are just a few ways to look at the Bible. There are hundreds of activities and approaches to help bring this cornerstone of our faith to life. In taking the Bible seriously remember always to study it in context, asking not only what it says, but also what it means.

Being a people of the Bible means working hard to understand its central truths and learning to tell the story to others. Students of the Bible are called on to think, study, and reason. Our purpose is not to worship a book, something people call bibliolatry. We worship a living and dynamic God, and we learn of God through this book. Our faith rests squarely in Christ; being firmly rooted in that relationship allows us to deal honestly and deeply with the whole Bible. Bible study is not an end in itself. It is a means of our becoming what God would have us become.

## Bible Study Tools

### Bible Dictionary

A Bible dictionary is a reference book that alphabetically lists significant terms and names found in the Bible and gives a great deal of helpful information about people, places, and events. Some volumes include definitions and explanations of major theological concepts and doctrines, as well as articles on history, archaeology, and geography. Many have cross-references, maps, illustrations, and pronunciation guides.

### Bible Commentary

A Bible commentary offers explanations and interpretations of the Bible, verse by verse, book by book. Most include a summary of each book, listing what scholars know about the history, authorship, date and

background of the text. There also is usually some sort of everyday life application of the texts to help clarify the meanings and to give a jump-start on a devotion or chapel talk.

### Concordance

A concordance is an alphabetical index of primary words found in the Bible. For example, if you were looking for the story of "that widow who did something with a coin," but didn't know where to begin, a concordance can help. You begin by thinking of the key words you can remember. In this instance it's the word *widow*. You can look up the word, and the concordance lists everywhere this word occurs in the Bible. The listings show the word in a sentence fragment, followed by the book, chapter, and verse, so you can quickly find the one you're looking for.

Concordances also help with word studies. If you were studying the word *prayer*, you could look it up in a concordance, and it would direct you to every instance it's used in the Bible.

## FOR MORE HELP

The Upper Room publishes a bi-monthly devotional magazine for youth titled *Devo'zine*. Each issue contains meditations, Scripture, prayers, articles, and reflection questions. Special savings are available for orders of ten or more copies. Their website is [www.upperroom.org/devozine](http://www.upperroom.org/devozine).

*Starting With the Old Testament*, by Stephen Travis. Published by Abingdon Press. Available through Cokesbury (800-672-1789).

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*Teaching the Bible to Adults and Youth*, by Dick Murray and Lyle E. Schaller. Published by Abingdon Press. Available through Cokesbury (800-672-1789).

*Introducing the Bible*, by William Barclay. Published by Abingdon Press. Available through Cokesbury (800-672-1789).