



Tips for family Bible study

I will study the way that is blameless. When shall I attain it? I will walk with integrity of heart within my house. Ps 101:2

A weekly or monthly family Bible study ritual is a powerful way for adults and children to come to know God. God is revealed as we listen and talk together as a family in a shared quest to engage the Bible. Together, as we read the Bible, we affirm the mystery and meaning of our lives. Together we experience a vision of the world as it is intended to be. Together we find insight for tomorrow. When we regularly study the scripture with our children, our faith and lives are shaped together in graceful ways.

Set the scene

Consider using one or several of the following approaches in your family Bible study ritual. Decide as a family where and when you want to study the Bible. Consider a comfortable room, where everyone can sit; or a special location set aside only for your family Bible study. You may find it helpful to set the time apart by lighting a candle, singing a song or psalm, and praying. Consider purchasing or using a “family Bible,” providing easy to read Bibles for every family member, or encouraging family members to bring their own Bibles.

The following approaches involve various levels of difficulty. Review each approach to determine its appropriateness for your family. Advance preparation, including gathering Bibles, commentaries, paper, pencils, glue, scissors, or other items, may be necessary for some Bible study experiences. Bible study methods ideal for families with young children are labeled with an asterisk.(*). Most of the Bible study approaches can be accomplished in thirty to sixty minutes.

Before you begin any of these Bible studies it is important to recall that the biblical story is a symbolic narrative. The goal of these approaches is not to explain a passage, prove a point or find a moral. These approaches will assist your family members to make meaning on varying levels, as they are able. Our insights vary, depending on our age, needs and experiences. God, however, can use the variety of insights in your family Bible study to show both divine and human love.

Sample Gathering Prayer

Loving God, you have given us many gifts for which we are thankful in our family. Bless the ties that bind our family together. Send your soothing peace to heal the wounds we inflict on those we love. Help us to forgive others as you forgive us. Help us to draw strength and comfort from our study of your holy word, and from those in our family. Amen.

The following Bible study (#1) is suggested for “first time” family Bible study experiences.

1. Share an Experience with the Bible*

Invite family members to respond to any or all of the following questions:

- My favorite Bible story is . . .



- My least favorite Bible story is . . .
- When I hear the Bible read I think/feel...
- When I study the Bible I think/feel...
- One question I have concerning the Bible is...

2. TRIP Bible Study

Read a Bible verse or passage and then ask the following four questions of that verse. Share your response with others as the Spirit leads you.

- What in this passage am I **T**hankful for?
- What does it reveal that I **R**egret or need to confess?
- How should I **I**ntercede or what should I pray for
- What **P**urpose for my day does this passage give me?

3. Inductive Bible Study

Read a Bible passage and ask the following questions:

- What does the text say? (or similar observation or knowledge question),
- What does it mean? (or similar interpretation or understanding question),
- What does it mean to us as a family? (or similar application or evaluation question).

4. African Bible Study

Invite the family to listen as one member reads the selected passage. Each member is then give the opportunity to respond to the question, “What word or phrase seems most significant or meaningful for you, and why?” The passage is read a second time and each member responds to the question, “How does this passage speak to your life now, and why?” The passage is then read for a third time and members respond to the question, “What will you change or do this week in response to this passage, and why?”

5. Voices of the Story*

In this study, a chosen passage is read and family members identify the biblical characters, individuals or groups. Each family member is assigned or selects a character, reads the story from the perspective of their character, and then shares what they (as the character) saw, heard, experienced, and felt.

6. Short Term Memorization*

In this study, participants are given ten minutes to memorize a selected passage. They then gather in pairs. One partner shares the passage from memory, while the other partner makes note of words or phrases shared correctly, omitted or changed. The partners then exchange roles. Small group discussion grows out of the participant’s response to the questions: “What was the easiest part to memorize, and why?” “What was most difficult, and why?” “What words or phrases were changed, and why?”

7. Story Then and Now

In this study, the chosen passage is explored by asking the questions: “What is the setting?” “When is this taking place?” “How does the story line progress?” “Who is the audience?” “How



would they understand the point of the story?” Next, participants take the story from its biblical setting and place it in a contemporary setting by responding to the questions: “Who are the contemporary people who would correspond to the biblical characters?” “What would be the setting?” etc.

8. Encounter the Bible

Select a Bible passage and present the passage through dramatic reading, discussion, research, drama, song, dance, etc. Ask, “What is the question to which this text responds?” Invite response. Then ask, “What further questions does this question and response evoke?” Use commentaries, concordances, dictionaries of the Bible, etc. to research according to the questions raised. Share with the entire group discoveries and allow for further questions and critical reflection. Summarize the learning and identify questions for further study.

9. Walking Around in the Bible*

Select a Bible passage to study. Invite family members to close their eyes and let their imagination move them to places described in the passage. Read or listen to a recording of the passage. Invite all family members to open their eyes and share the feelings they have at the moment. Encourage family members to briefly tell the story of their “walk” in the Bible by inviting them to respond to the following questions:

- How did you feel in the situation?
- What were you trying to accomplish?
- What did you actually do?
- Who was involved with you?

You may wish to have another member record on paper or newsprint the feelings, intentions, and observations shared. Next, invite the same family member to tell how they believe God was involved in this experience. The following questions may help with that sharing:

- What was God doing?
- Were you aware of God’s presence?
- Could you visualize God’s presence?
- What did it seem God wanted from you or for you?

Finally, allow any family member who desires to share how their “walk” was similar or different.

10. Sharing Method*

Read the chosen Bible passage aloud using different voices for different characters. One person can read the narrative lines. Use a contemporary Bible translation if possible. Discuss the thoughts, feelings and sensations evoked by the passage. Discuss the following question: “What does this passage say to you about relating to others?” If helpful, use a commentary or other reference book to become familiar with the background of the passage. Invite family members to discuss situations in their life similar to the Bible story. Ask, “What changes could be made to improve your relationship with some one with whom you struggle to get along?” Discuss as a family any insights gained from this passage.

11. Family Bible Study*

Select a Bible story to read out loud. Invite family members to pay close attention to what in the



story stands out for them. Have the Bible passage read, or listen to a record or video presentation of the story. If helpful, suggest family members write down what words, people and images most impressed them. Next, determine what God may be saying to your family in this passage. Ask, "How is this story the story of our life as a family? Where are their connections to our life together?" Encourage family members to share personal examples of when they faced this or similar situations. Ask, "What does this passage say to those situations?" Explore as a family ways you can live more fully in the future because of this encounter with the Bible story.

12. Paraphrasing*

Select a short passage of Scripture to study. Take a sheet of paper and divide it into two sections by drawing a line from top to bottom. Head one column "Paraphrase" and the other "Application," Working as a family, read the passage in the following sequence:

- identify key persons, places or things (nouns)
- identify key action words (verbs)
- identify other significant words

Working from the list you created, paraphrase the passage in common, everyday language. Once the paraphrase is complete, apply your "translated" passage to your family's life and situation. Consider the following questions to help with application:

- Where do you see this working in your life or the life of our family?
- What new possibility is here?
- What would might happen if we took these words seriously?
- What person or situation do these words suggest we look at differently?

As family members respond, encourage asking each other questions.

13. Head, Heart and Hand

Choose a Bible passage to study. Invite family members to listen to the passage as it is read. Encourage the use of a theological dictionary, concordance, or other biblical resources to read about the meaning of the passage, why it was written and the context in which it was written. Ask individuals to share what they find with the entire family. Invite family members to listen as the passage as it is re-read and pick out the heart of the passage. Ask individuals to share with others in the family. Invite family members to listen as the passage is read for a third time and quietly reflect on what God is saying to through this passage. Ask them to select an action they will do this week as a result of studying this passage. Encourage everyone to share their action with the entire family.

14. Depth Method

Choose a Bible passage to study. Invite family members to share their responses to the following questions:

- What does this say to our world?
- What does this say to our country?
- What does this say to our community?
- What does this say to our congregation?
- What does this say to our family?
- What does this say to me?



Encourage family members to accept all contributions to the discussion.

15. Discover and Create*

Select a Bible passage. Invite the family to listen to the passage as it is read twice. Encourage family members to reflect on the passage by:

- identifying the images that came to them as they were listening
- identifying the feelings they had as they listened to the passage

Ask family members to make a visual expression that summarizes their images and feelings. Provide paper, pencils, crayons, construction paper, scissors, glue, tape, and magic markers. After the visual expressions are finished invite each family member to talk about what they created and what it means to them.

16. Eight Questions

Select and read out loud a Bible passage to study. As a family work through the following questions in order. Refer to Bible commentaries and other resources as helpful.

- Where and when does this story take place and from whose viewpoint is it described?
- Who are the main characters in the passage?
- What are the difficult words or phrases in the passage?
- What historical situation lies behind the passage?
- What are the main ideas of the passage?
- What do you think the passage meant for those who first heard it?
- What does the passage say to people today?
- What do you hear God saying to our family through this passage?

Provide opportunity for every family member to share their responses to the “eight questions.”

17. Four-Step Method

Choose a short Bible passage or story to study. Individually compose your own “translation” of the passage. Relate your translation to your life by responding to the following questions:

- Where do I see this working in my life?
- What new possibility is there here for me?
- What would I be concerned about if I took these words seriously?
- What would I view differently than I do now?

Gather as family and take turns reading translations. Try to arrive at a consensus about the meaning of the passage by focusing on the possibilities for your family now.

Sample Scattering or Sending Prayer

Thank you, Jesus, for this time together as a family. Thank you for the opportunity to hear your word, listen to one another and share our own thoughts. Bless us as we leave from this special study. Send us more boldly to run the race set before us. We go now in Christ's name. Amen.

[adapted from *Fanning the Flames of Discipleship: ELCA Christian Education Planning Guide 2001-2002*]