

Tips for Catholic Family Bible Study

By Matthew Arnold

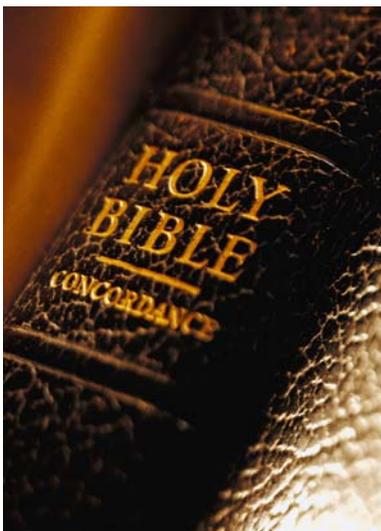
As with any Bible study, to be effective, family Bible study requires three things: a time, a place and a plan. You may choose to have your study time on a certain day or days after dinner, or perhaps before bed-time. You might want to gather around the coffee table in the living room or family room. And, of course, you should know what you'll be reading. The Sunday Mass readings are a natural choice for a weekly study. My DVD *The Miracles of Jesus* also provides you with a structure suitable for a family study.

Pray

Naturally, you'll begin with prayer. Your family is entering into a dialog with God, so, before you read, ask the Holy Spirit to help each of you understand the message He has for you in the day's reading. As St. Augustine said, "We speak to God when we pray, He answers when we read the Scriptures."

Read

Read the day's chosen passage out loud slowly and prayerfully. For the sake of comprehension, I suggest that you choose a more "dynamic" translation of



the Bible like the *New American Bible (NAB)*, *Jerusalem Bible*, or the *Good*

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News Translation (GNT).

Even with a dynamic translation that avoids difficult words, it is inevitable that there will be certain unfamiliar terms, phrases and figures of speech that require explanation. A good study Bible or concordance will give you the meaning of names, locations and so on.

After the reading, ask the children questions that review the main points of the

passage. You must make sure that these points are understood and that the characters stand out as real living people in the minds of the children. This first impression is the peg that everything else hangs upon. As the old saying goes, "If you don't drive the nail in far enough, it won't hold the picture."

Reflect

Reflecting or meditating on what you have just read is a key part of the process of

effective Bible study. A pastoral statement from the U.S. Bishops suggests asking questions like these: What is God telling us in this passage about Himself, about the Father, or about us and our salvation? How does He ask us to respond to this Word of His love now, in prayer, and also in our life?

Questions like these will help all "dig deeper" into the meaning of the passage. Some people find

it helpful to write their answers in a journal or notebook. It's also a good idea to re-read the passage and discover what new insights may suggest themselves after your reflection.

Commentary

Next, it helps to consider the thoughts of those who have studied and commented on the Scriptures over the life of the Church. There are many good Catholic commentaries available, especially for the Mass readings. If you choose to follow the passages covered on *The Miracles of Jesus*, you may watch the segment on the passage you're studying at this time. The DVD attractively presents the passage itself plus a commentary, intended for all ages, that unpacks the teaching of the Church and applies it to life today.

Application

In his letter to **Timothy**, St. Paul tells us,

All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching the truth, rebuking error, correcting faults, and giving instruction for right living.

Tim 3.16

So the Bible doesn't just

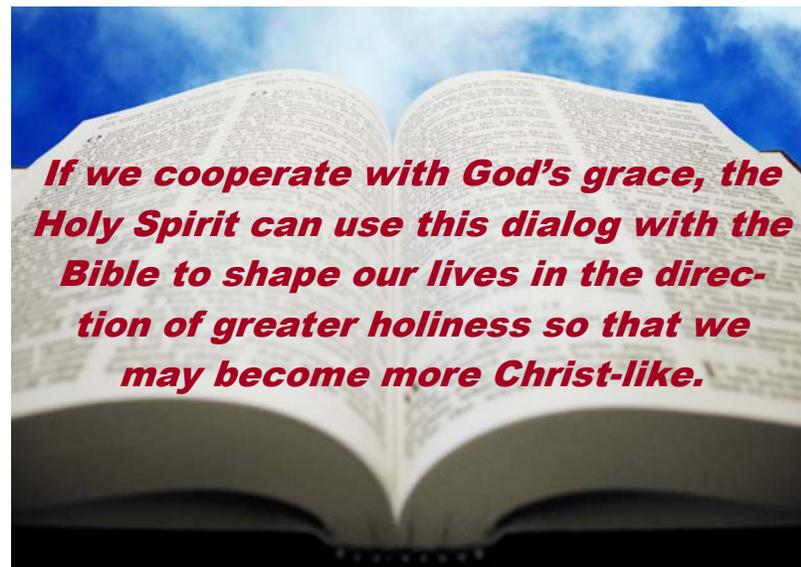
give us information about God, but also helps us live in right relationship to God and each other.

After reflecting on the meaning of the passage and reading or watching a good commentary, it's time for all to ask themselves: How does what we've dis-

that the Bible comes alive and truly becomes God's Word to us today.

Pray it Again

You'll end this day's journey in God's Word as you began, in prayer. Thank God for coming to you and sharing his Word with your



covered about this Word of God's love apply to my life today—my situations at home, work, school or church?

If we cooperate with God's grace, the Holy Spirit can use this dialog through the Bible to shape our lives in the direction of greater holiness so that we may become more Christ-like. That's why this step is so important. It's only when we apply what we read in the Scriptures to our lives

family. Ask the Father, through the Son and in the Holy Spirit, to help you live out and apply what you've learned together. On the day(s) that you do Bible study, you can take your discoveries from Scripture into your regular prayer time or family Rosary.

By reading, praying and living out the truths of Scripture, you'll make God's Word come alive in your family every day.