



Sitting with God: reading and hearing scripture with young people

Ah, the all-important Bible study. Adults concerned about youth ministries clamor for it, even though they might not be involved in one themselves. And youth. Well, youth have varying opinions. Mostly, they fear it may be boring. All too often, this may be true.

When consulting a group of Bible study professionals—also know as seventh and eighth graders—Patricia had the answer: “Why don’t we just have people read the Bible together out loud, ask lots of questions, and talk about the things they don’t understand?”

An ah-ha moment! This was powerful and provocative. Granted, this is a very inductive approach to reading and hearing Scripture. But it is a richly rewarding way to experience the power of the Scriptures with God’s young saints. It is also a healthy posture for the Christian life, to borrow that old Latin phrase, *fides quaerens intellectum*, or, *faith seeking understanding*.

There are many ways to study the Bible. This is only one approach, yet it is an approach that is all too often overlooked. The approach itself tends to work better with an established small group, such as a leadership team of young people or a group that meets in the home or at school.

It’s important that the group:

- has a sense of openness, trust and willingness to risk.
- wants to dig deeper.
- be focused (we are gathering to do this one thing...and eat, of course).
- meets in a clearly defined space—an enclosed room rather than sitting on the floor in the middle of the fellowship hall during a high traffic time.

These values and principles are designed to help you better understand this particular approach to Bible study.

Core values

- God is the primary agent, wherever and whenever we gather. The promised Holy Spirit drives and guides our reading and hearing of the Bible.
- We read the Bible *first* not to understand but to *hear* what it has to say. In other words, when we approach the text the first posture is one of listening, paying attention, noticing. A nice question to frame this is: What does the text want to say to me, to us?

- We do not dismiss content nor the historical background when reading the Bible. Rather, we are open first to being encountered by the living voice of the Gospel. God speaks in and through the stories of the Bible. First we listen, then we seek to understand, decide and act.
 - With Martin Luther we respond to the question, “What is the Bible good for?” by saying “*Was Christum treibt*”: (it is) that which bears Christ. We read and hear Scripture because it drives home our need for Christ and brings Jesus into our midst.
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Guiding principles

- This particular process is marked by openness: to the presence, activity and prompting of God, to one another, to differences of opinion, and to questions.
 - This particular approach to reading and hearing Scripture is open to and appreciates genuine inquiry. This Bible study process is designed to offer a safe place where questions are expected and honored, especially if there are few responses, let alone answers.
 - “Content” is not dismissed. If the group is not able to adequately respond to one or more questions, participants are invited to take responsibility for finding additional information before the group meets again. There are resources that one can consult (i.e., commentaries) as well as “people” resources—a parent or other adult relative, a friend, another trusted adult (i.e., teacher, neighbor, pastor). In fact, this is an excellent way to foster intergenerational, public faith conversation.
 - The role of the leader in this process is much less information guru and much more of a *facilitator and coach*. Thus the task becomes keeping the group focused, open, questioning, listening and talking.
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Reading and hearing scripture: the inductive approach

Try this approach with your young people. Open with prayer, particularly asking God’s Spirit to lead, guide, inspire and empower your encounter with the biblical texts and stories.

1. Invite everyone in the group to read the text silently. (Throughout this study process honor moments of silence if they happen.)
2. Ask someone to read the text out loud, and ask the rest of the group to listen and pay close attention.
3. Ask: What do you notice as you read and hear the text? What gets your attention or makes you curious?
4. Ask: What do these verses say to us? What message do you hear? What do they mean for us right now?
5. What are these verses suggesting about who we are and what we are called to do?
6. To what specific action(s) does the text call us?

Close with prayer, particularly thanking God for the opportunity to dwell in God’s presence and in the Word, and for the guidance and strength to live what you have learned.

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