WHY READ THE BIBLE?

THE MAIN AND THE PLAIN SERIES VINEYARD YOUTH CURRICULUM

vineyard youth
Hello, friends. What you hold in your hands is the product of lots of people, lots of prayer, and lots of purpose. As youth leaders in the Vineyard movement, we believe that the work we do with students will have much influence on what the movement will look like over the next ten to twenty years.

We set out to design a curriculum that communicates and reinforces the biblical and kingdom values of the Vineyard while inviting students to embrace the reality that they are part of something bigger than themselves.

Understanding the diversity within the Vineyard movement, we purposefully designed curriculum that can be utilized by groups of differing sizes led by either paid or volunteer leaders in any geographical setting or location. Easy, right? We believe we accomplish this by offering a buffet of activities that allow you—the in-the-trenches leader to choose what works for you and your group. We’re pretty sure no one will use all of the material proposed, but we’re confident some of it will be a good fit for your group.

Each lesson will include:
- Experiential, hands-on activities that reflect a variety of learning styles
- Large group questions to frame a conversation (I.E., not a lecture).
- Application suggestions to live and reveal the kingdom of God.
- Small group questions.
- Times for you as the leader to tune into what God is doing in you and your students’ lives.
- Times for students to hear from God for themselves

This curriculum is written by youth leaders for youth leaders. If you would like to join the team and contribute your voice to the conversation, we would love to hear from you.

You may not hear this enough, but thank you for what you do. It’s important, it’s needed, and it’s laying the foundation for a new generation of leaders to continue the good things God has already done in the Vineyard movement. Keep up the good work!
Why This Topic?
For many teens, reading the Bible can be a confusing and boring exercise. However, the practice of reading the Bible is one of the most foundational practices that followers of Jesus have used for millennia to draw near to God.

This curriculum is aimed at helping teens grow in their understanding of the Word of God by answering some of the questions most frequently asked about the Bible. It then will teach them two methods for reading and applying the Bible, in hopes of launching them on the lifelong practice of Bible reading.

Connecting to Vineyard Values
We intentionally connect our curriculum to Vineyard Values and Distinctives. This series connects to the Vineyard Distinctive “The Main and the Plain.” This is the Vineyard’s commitment to teaching the main and plain teachings of Jesus, and by his grace and Spirit, learning to live by them. You can read more about these here: https://vineyardusa.org/about/vineyard-distinctives/

Helpful Reminders For You, the Youth Leader
In working with this curriculum there are a few ideas we’d like to keep in front of you:

- **Plug in your stories** wherever you can. These are bare bones here. You add the meat!

- **Experiential learning lasts.** We’ve tried to make this as experiential as possible, rather than just providing head knowledge. We encourage you the leader to try it out—take some risks!

- **Humor is key.** It’s hard for us to artificially add this from a distance, but we encourage you to find all chances you can to connect through humor.

- **Context matters.** We don’t know what’s going on in your group right now, but you do. We encourage you to pray and think about how this message applies to the new ones in your group, the veterans, and the seekers. How does this tie into the message of salvation through Jesus?

These Lessons Are on Video!
Go to www.vineyardyouthusa.com/resources to view the video teaching for this series. Each lesson is taught by Christian Dunn, and you can follow along with the written version.

Youth Alpha
In this lesson we make use of several videos from Youth Alpha. Youth Alpha is an invaluable resource and it is free. I would recommend starting your own Youth Alpha (https://alpha.org/alpha-youth-series) series with your group at some point. For the purposes of this curriculum you can start an account and access the videos we reference, or you can find them on YouTube.
“Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path” Psalm 119:105 (NIV). As you prepare for this series, spend a little time meditating on how God’s word has been a lamp to your feet. How has God used his word to illuminate your path, help you with decisions, guide you through difficult times, and call you into new adventures? Take some time before starting this series to thank God for the way his word has changed and touched your life.

Bible Trivia Game!
To get things started it might be fun to do a quick Bible trivia game. Get some candy ahead of time to give to the winner. Depending on your group size, you can either split into teams or play as individuals. One place to get some questions is here: https://icebreakerideas.com/bible-trivia-questions-answers/.

If you don’t like those, a quick Google search will help you find Bible trivia questions you would like to use.

Before you get into the lesson, start with a short discussion to discover what your teens think about the Bible. It will be a good baseline for you going forward as the leader to know where you are starting from as a group. Most likely the answers will be pretty diverse. Here are some questions to ask your group:

1. What is the Bible?
2. Who wrote the Bible?
3. How did we end up with the Bible we have today?
Read 2 Timothy 3:16–17 aloud to the group (or have a volunteer read it)

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

There are a couple teaching points about the Bible that you can share from this passage alone:

1. Scripture is inspired by God.
2. It is good for learning about how to follow Jesus.
3. It helps us be prepared to be used by God.

This is a helpful example to share as your group thinks about what the Bible really is and how it came to be in the form we have now: What if you decided to take a weeklong hike through the Grand Canyon? About twelve people die there each year! So you come to me and ask if I have a map, some instructions on how much food and water to bring, a list of supplies you’ll need, and some weather information. How would you know if you can trust my information?

• What if I had never been to the Grand Canyon?
• What if I made it all up?
• What if I only researched it online?
• What if I was an expert who had traversed the Grand Canyon over fifty times?

In the same way, understanding where the Bible comes from, how it was written, who it was written by, and why it was written will help you decide if you want it to be the authority—the map and instructions—for your life.
DISCUSSION

For the leader: If you can, this might be a good time to show your students a list of the books of the Bible on a screen, or with a handout. Depending on the age range of your group, some may not be familiar with it. After the video is a great opportunity to introduce the ideas of the Old Testament, the Gospels, Acts, the Letters, and so on.

1. What was something you learned that you didn’t know before you watched that video?

2. What questions about the Bible did watching this video raise for you?

VIDEO

To get started, let’s watch this video together from The Bible Project. As you watch, be thinking about what questions you may have.

https://thebibleproject.com/videos/what-is-bible/

VIDEO

Now we are going to watch another video. Now that we know what the Bible is, let’s see what its main message is. Is the Bible just a random assortment of stories, or is there one integrated story—one message—that God is trying to communicate through the authors?


DISCUSSION

1. How would you put the overall story of the Bible into your own words?

2. Why do you think humanity keeps making the same mistakes, choosing to follow their own path instead of God’s?

You have may found today’s lesson boring, or maybe you found it interesting. Either way, the point of today was to lay the foundation for the rest of our conversations. Before we can really learn to trust the Bible and read it for ourselves, we need to know where it came from and if it is even trustworthy.
SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

1. Do you enjoy reading the Bible?

2. Why do you read the Bible?

3. What do you like about reading the Bible?

4. What is difficult for you about reading the Bible?

APPLICATION CHALLENGE

Week One:
Each week in this series we will issue an application challenge. The goal is to get all of us reading and becoming more familiar with the Bible.

For week 1, ask the students to read Mark 1–2 at least once during the week. While they are reading, have them ask this question: What do these chapters tell me about Jesus?
BIG IDEA

The Bible is a reliable source and we can trust what it says.

As you have this discussion today, you may be faced with some of your own doubts and questions surrounding the Bible. Rather than burying that, be aware of it. It may be helpful for you to remember what the father of the demon possessed boy said to Jesus, “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!” God is more than willing to help us, even in our unbelief of him. If you have questions about or struggles with the Bible, it may be helpful to talk to a mentor or someone you trust further along in the faith.

STARTER

Play the game “two truths and a lie.”

This is a great starter game for framing the discussion about the reliability of Scripture. Have everyone write three statements about themselves on a piece of paper. Two of the statements need to be true, and one needs to be a lie. The goal is to make it hard for others to know which one is the lie, so instruct the teens to pick truths that others may not know about them, and to pick a lie that seems probable. Next each person reads their three statements, and people vote for the statement they think is the lie. Once everyone has voted, the person reveals which statement was a lie. Everyone who guessed it correctly gets a point. The person who read their statements gets a point for every person they tricked. Do this for everyone, total up the points, and declare the winner.

LESSON

For the leader: This week’s lesson is the most information-packed lesson of the series. As we tested it out, it proved to be a little too much for younger ones. You may need to gauge the interest level of your group and find ways to communicate this in a non-boring “school-like” way. We felt that all the information was important to put at your fingertips, but you choose what’s best to use for your group.

If you are using the Video Curriculum, start it here.
Infographics
If you’re interested, you can download these to hand out to your group and augment your teaching.

Reliability of the Bible
https://visualunit.files.wordpress.com/2010/12/nt_reliability1.jpg

Who wrote the Bible, and when was it written?

Today we are going to deal with several questions that people normally ask about the Bible. These may be questions you have wondered about, or they may be questions that your friends have asked.

QUESTION #1:
HASN’T THE NEW TESTAMENT CHANGED OVER TIME?
• Many people wonder this. Can we trust the biblical account of Jesus and the early church?
• Isn’t it true, or at least possible, that a lot of what we read about Jesus (his miracles, his resurrection, his claims to be God) were added later by his followers?
• Isn’t it true that over the years the stories about Jesus got exaggerated and changed, and in reality most of this didn’t really happen?

There are many points that can be made to help us understand why we can trust the reliability of the Bible. Today we will cover four of them that may help you answer this question.

VIDEO
Take a moment to watch this video, and then we will discuss:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4C46_RQtJv0&t=359s
Youth Alpha Episode #2: Jesus: Who is He? (Watch 3:55-6:30)
Based on the video, what are some reasons that we can trust that what we are reading in the Bible is the same as what the authors wrote originally?

**Reason #1: Number of Copies**
As the video shows, the Bible is the most verified ancient text we have in human history. Think about that!

- There are so many copies that we can be certain we are reading what they originally wrote.
- These copies come from different geographic locations and all confirm each other.

**Reason #2: Short Time between Source and Copy (Clark 2017, 76)**
The video references the short time between source copy and manuscripts. This short time means that there was no time for myth to creep in. This is especially true when compared to other ancient texts we take as reliable.

The Gospels were written thirty to fifty years after the life of Jesus. This means there was also a short time between the events and the actual first copy (source copy)! What this means is:

(In case you are interested: Acts was written no earlier than AD 62. Luke wrote Luke before Acts, and Mark was written before Luke. That puts Mark somewhere between the years AD 55–60, which is no more than thirty years after the death and resurrection of Jesus. This is the equivalent of a news flash in ancient history! (Strobel 2016, 33)

People who were at the events written about in the New Testament were still alive when these accounts were written and would have had every reason to disagree and prove it wrong. Also, it is crazy to think that Jesus’ followers would follow through with giving their lives for something they knew to be untrue.

The oral tradition was even shorter (Strobel 2016, 34).

The time between the death and resurrection and the communication of this amazing miracle was even shorter if you look at some of Paul’s writings. In a few places you can find “oral tradition”—sayings that were spoken even a few years after Jesus’ death—that Paul includes. If his resurrection was a lie, these were started within a few years, which debunks the “myth” theory.
In discussing these Bible passages in *The Case for Christ*, Lee Strobel said, “That’s not later mythology from forty or more years down the road...A good case can be made for saying that Christian belief in the Resurrection, though not yet written down, can be dated to within two years of that very event” (Strobel 2016, 35).

**Reason #3: Internal Credibility**

As you read the Gospels in particular, you’ll see that there are many examples of proof within the text that verify it is true and not something that was made up later. Here are two examples:

**Names of people:**
The writers include specific names of random people in their stories. These people would have still been around when these accounts were written. They even give specifics about people, like this verse does: “A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross” (Mark 15:21). If they were making this story up, they wouldn’t do that because those people could easily disprove their writing.

**Counterproductive content:**
Throughout the Gospels you’ll find content that doesn’t make sense if someone was making this story up (Clark 2017, 77). In other words, if the authors of the Gospels (for instance) were fabricating this story in an effort to propagate a myth about Jesus being God, why would they include content that would seem to contradict that claim? The simple reason is that they put these stories in there simply because they are true, and regardless of whether they “helped the cause” of telling people about Jesus being God. Here are a few examples:

1. Matthew 26:39 where Jesus prays, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.” Why would Matthew put this in there? It seems to show Jesus wanting to “get out of” saving the world.

2. Jesus’ prayer on the cross in Matthew 27:46: “My God, my God why have you forsaken me?” Why would Matthew put this in there? If he was trying to make us believe that Jesus is God, why would he include these examples of “weakness” as part of Jesus’ story? The only reason could be that it is true.

*For the leader: If you have extra time you can look at these examples of the oral tradition: Philippians 2:6–11, Colossians 1:15–20, 1 Corinthians 15:3–7.*
3. In Mark 6:5 it says that Jesus “could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them.” Again, why would Mark put this in there? If the whole story of Jesus being God was a fabrication, wouldn’t the Gospel writers portray him as this mythical figure who never has a problem?

4. Throughout the Gospels, his followers argue for power, deny him, and doubt him. Again, why would the writers put this information in these stories? There would be no reason to, unless it was true.

5. In John 20, the women are the first to find the open tomb, and the first to tell others of the risen Jesus. In Jewish society, women could not bear witness (Enduring Word). Women were seen as not trustworthy and so you couldn’t ask them to come speak in a court case, for instance. However, the writers of the resurrection account, which is the most important piece of the Christian story, note that women were the first to find the empty tomb, the first to tell others, and the first eyewitnesses of the resurrected Jesus. They would NEVER write it this way if it was a lie. The only conclusion is, yes, this is true.

As we talked through some of these reasons for being able to trust the Bible, which ones are the most compelling to you and why?

**QUESTION #2: AREN’T THERE A BUNCH OF MISTAKES IN THE BIBLE?**

One author, Bart Ehrman, wrote that there are over 400,000 discrepancies between copies of the New Testament (Clark 2017, 67). The truth is that a vast majority of these are misspellings, misplaced commas, typos, and the like. And then Ehrman multiplied discrepancies for every copy. So one typo was counted as thousands of “discrepancies.”

We know what was in the original manuscripts with 99.5 percent accuracy. “The New Testament, then, has not only survived in more manuscripts than any other book from antiquity, but it has survived in a purer form than any other great book—a form that is 99.5 percent pure” (Strobel 2016, 65).
What kind of errors are in the 0.5 percent?

“These are not what we typically imagine—long narratives or chunks of text containing stories detrimental to Christian doctrine. Rather the variations are a word here or there in a verse here or there…in truth, there are only two disputed passages in the entire New Testament that are more than two verses in length” (Clark 2017, 68).

These two passages are found in Mark 16:9–20 and John 7:53–8:11.

Christians don’t attempt to hide these verses or deny the issues. If you read your Bible, you will see notes in most English translations at both of these locations. Briefly, these are the issues:

Mark 16:8: Most scholars agree that the final verses of Mark are a later addition, and that the earliest manuscripts end at Mark 16:8. Not everyone agrees though. Regardless, it doesn’t change the fact that Mark ends with the resurrection of Jesus, so either way you don’t lose anything significant doctrinally for the teachings of the Bible (Strobel 2016, 236).

John 7:53–8:11: The other disputable passage is John 7:53–8:11. This section most likely did not appear in the earliest manuscripts. Sometimes it appeared with asterisks by it, sometimes in different locations (after Luke 21:38; after John 21:24; or after John 7:36). Most scholars agree that this is historically accurate, that it is most likely John, and that it was worthy to keep in the account of John, even if they aren’t fully sure where it should be placed (Enduring Word, John 8).

QUESTION #3: WHO DECIDED WHAT BOOKS WERE IN THE BIBLE?

For the Leader: It’s up to you if you have time to do this one. This is a question that many people wonder about. Just talking about it briefly may help your teens in the long run.

Have you ever wondered how the Bible was put together? Near the end of the fourth century, a council of church leaders, the Council of Carthage, made the final determination of what New Testament books would be in the Bible.

Some wrongly assume they just picked them, however the truth is much different. Here are some key points:
Each book that was chosen had to fulfill strict qualifications.

Most of the books chosen were obvious. Asking whether they should be included was a little like asking, “What are the four most popular professional sports leagues in America?” Everyone would answer the NFL, NBA, MLB, and NHL. It’s obvious. It was similar with the New Testament books. This was a recognition of what everyone already knew. As New Testament scholar Bruce Metzger notes, “You see, the canon is a list of authoritative books more than it is an authoritative list of books. These documents didn’t derive their authority from being selected; each one was authoritative before anyone gathered them together. The early church merely listened and sensed that these were authoritative accounts” (Strobel 2016, 69).

That was a lot of information to take in wasn’t it? What did you find interesting? What did you learn that you didn’t know? What did you learn that helps you feel more confident in the Bible?

1. What questions or doubts do you have about the Bible?

2. Has the information you learned today changed how you think about the Bible?

3. If the Bible is accurate and reliable, what does that mean for your life?

Week Two:
Each week in this series we will issue an application challenge. The goal is to get all of us reading and becoming more familiar with the Bible.

These are the four places where the Gospels record the resurrection of Jesus: Matthew 28:1–10, Mark 16:1–8 and 9–14 (longer ending), Luke 24:1–44, and John 20:1–29. This week read two of them and compare the similarities and differences.
In Matthew 4:4, Jesus says, “Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.” What has God been speaking to you lately? You are in a role where you are giving to others on a regular basis. Therefore, it is critical for you to be hearing from God for yourself. His word to you is the sustenance, the strength, the wisdom, the power, and the discernment you need to be the person, friend, and leader you want to be. Take a moment and just allow him to speak to you through this verse, and to strengthen you with his word.

Give everyone in your group three small pieces of paper. Have them each write down a person, a place, and a thing. Then fold them and put them all into a bowl. Break into two teams. Each team gets 30 seconds for one of their people to pull papers from the bowl and try to get their teammates to guess it by using only words. Obviously they can’t use the word on the paper! If you want to make the game last longer, once you get through all the papers, put them back in the bowl and use them for charades: no talking—just actions!

For the leader: Part of what we are hoping to do in this series is to help teens explore how the Bible can be relevant for their lives. We know that it is relevant, but that doesn’t mean much if they don’t know how to access the meaning. Be ready to encourage teens that it’s okay if they don’t think it is relevant, and that we can learn together over time to find the meaning and relevance in it. Encourage them to see Bible reading as a lifelong journey, and one they can start right now.

1. Have you ever tried reading the Bible on your own? How was it? Did it speak to you? Confuse you? Help you? Frustrate you?

2. Why do we read the Bible?

3. Is the Bible relevant for you, a teenager, in the 21st century?
Today we are going to talk about three reasons why we read the Bible. But first let’s watch a short testimony of how important God’s word is to those who don’t have as easy access to it as we do.

Youth Alpha Video #2 “Bible”—watch from 3:15 to 6:00
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ExQ8MRAI7UE&t=238s

Remember you can get an account here:  https://alpha.org/alpha-youth-series. If you watch the video on Youtube, there is a logo superimposed on it the whole time.

From this video you can see that in America we really do take the Bible for granted. What is so special about the Bible that a government would ban it, and that people would be willing to die for it? Would you be willing to go to jail for this?

THREE REASONS WE READ THE BIBLE

Reason #1: We get to know Jesus and build our relationship with him.

John ends his gospel with a powerful statement: “But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:31).

The whole point of the Bible is to point us to Jesus. In Luke 24 the resurrected Jesus walks with two disciples and it says, “beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself” (Luke 24:27). The whole story leads up to, and culminates, in Jesus. So when we read the Bible there is always something we can learn about him!

For the leader: Share a story of how the Bible has helped you connect with Jesus in a greater, life transforming way.
The Bible itself isn’t what we worship. It leads us to a relationship with Jesus. That is the whole point. It all points, like a road sign, to finding and deepening a relationship with Jesus.

As you read it, that is one thing to keep in mind. No matter what you are reading, you can ask yourself how it is teaching you about Jesus, or helping you to connect with him.

**Reason #2: We believe that God is speaking to us.**

Let’s look at a couple verses about the Bible together and then discuss what we can learn about how God speaks to us through the Bible. (Go around and have a few people take turns reading these.)

*2 Timothy 3:16-17*

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

*Psalm 119:105*

Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.

*Colossians 3:16*

Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly.

*Matthew 4:4*

Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

God speaks to us through the Bible by:

- Giving us direction for our lives
- Speaking to us about our relationship with him
- Helping us grow as people
- Encouraging, strengthening, and challenging us
- Preparing us to do ministry and serve others
- And more!

Because God is speaking to us, we are reading the Bible for transformation, not just information. Here are a couple of ways we can tune in to better hear God speak to us through the Bible:

Be prayerful. When you read the Bible, approach his word with and through prayer.
Be spiritually engaged/hungry/thoughtful/curious. Don’t just read it quickly to get through it. Engage with it!

Be teachable. Approach the word of God with humility, looking for how God will transform your life each time.

**Reason # 3: We are changed by God’s words.**

In John 10:10, Jesus says, “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”

God’s plan is for you to have the fullest life, but that doesn’t mean the easiest life.

He wants you to know him, and to know yourself—to grow and mature and be refined to be the best version of yourself. He wants you to be who he created you to be.

*For the leader: Part of what we are hoping to do in this series is to help teens explore how the Bible can be relevant for their lives. We know that it is relevant, but that doesn’t mean much if they don’t know how to access the meaning. Be ready to encourage teens that it’s okay if they don’t think it is relevant, and that we can learn together over time to find the meaning and relevance in it. Encourage them to see Bible reading as a lifelong journey, and one they can start right now.*

Hebrews 4:12

For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

Reading, listening to, praying through, and applying the word of God changes us in many ways:

- It gives us faith. Romans 10:17 says, “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.”

- It convicts us of sin. Psalm 119:11 says, “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.”

- It changes our behavior: 2 Timothy 3:16 talks about how scripture provides “…training in righteousness.”

- It provides encouragement. Romans 15:4 says, “For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we
might have hope.

It challenges us and refines our character. Hebrews 4:12: “For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.”

And more!

Rick Warren says, “God’s Word generates life, created faith, produces change, frightens the Devil, causes miracles, heals hurts, builds character, transforms circumstances, imparts joy, overcomes adversity, defeats temptation, infuses hope, releases power, cleanses our minds, brings things into being, and guarantees our future forever! We cannot live without the Word of God!” (Warren 2016, 186).

Has a Bible verse, Bible story, or even a teaching you’ve heard in church or youth group ever really stuck with you and made you live, act, or think differently? If so, can you share what it was, and how it changed you?
Read Philippians 4:4–9 and listen for what God is saying to you through this:
Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

1. What is one encouragement that you can take from these verses?

2. If Jesus were in front of you speaking these words directly to you, what specifically would speak to your heart?

3. Do you ever struggle with anxiety? How does it affect you? Does anything in this passage give you hope or help you deal with anxiety?

4. What can you learn about Jesus through this passage?

Week Three:
Each week in this series we will issue an application challenge. The goal is to get all of us reading and becoming more familiar with the Bible.

Read Philippians chapters 1–2. There’s no need to read it all at once. It’s often best to break it into smaller chunks. As you read, ask the Lord to show you something about him—or about you!
Have you ever felt that the weight of doing youth ministry, the responsibility of discipling young teens in faith, is too heavy of a burden? This morning as I’m writing this curriculum, this verse came to my heart for you: “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30).

Remind yourself that no matter how heavy the weight is for caring for these teens in your life, Jesus is carrying it with you. Not only that, but he is offering you grace so that the burden is light and easy.

You will need some large plastic cups for this game. Break the group into pairs. Each pair will put a cup on the ground between them. The objective of the game is to be the first one to grab the cup once the leader gives the command “Cup.” Here’s how you play: The leader will give these commands in any order, and for as long as they want: Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes. The people playing have to put their hands on whatever body part the leaders says. Eventually the leader will say, “Cup,” and each player will try to grab it. Whoever succeeds gets a point. Play until one person has two points. Then have winners play each other in the same fashion until you get to the ultimate winner.

For the leader: If you have people in your group who are still exploring faith, this discussion could elicit a variety of answers. Eventually you can land on something like this: “As we explore faith either as Christians or as people who are not sure yet, we need to learn to read the Bible for ourselves so we know what it says, rather than relying solely on what others say about it.”
Why do you believe what you believe?

Many scholars say we are living in a “post-Christian” culture. This culture embraces a lot of the values we would assume come from the Bible (like treating others well, caring for the poor, looking for meaning and purpose in life), but it rejects the authority of the Bible. So how do you know what you believe? How do you define your worldview?

The question of why you believe what you believe is a tough one, because as teens much of your Bible knowledge has been given to you.

Think about young children who are fed by their parents until they can feed themselves. Your parents aren’t still spoon feeding you dinner, right?

It is time for you to learn to read the Bible for yourself. You need to know for yourself why you believe what you believe.

It is great to be taught by others. In fact it is necessary and part of God’s plan.

But as you are taught by others, it should drive you to seek the truth for yourself too.

When you feel doubt, or are challenged, or experience temptation, you want to have more to fall back on than “my pastor said this.” You want to be able to look in the Bible and find it for yourself.

Let’s look at an example. Did Jesus really claim to be God? How do you know? Can you find it? Have you ever read it? Here are some verses that reveal whether Jesus claimed to be God:

“Jesus said to them, ‘My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working.’ For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.” (John 5:17–18)

“Then they asked him, ‘Where is your father?’ ‘You do not know me or my Father,’ Jesus replied. ‘If you knew me, you would know my Father also.’” (John 8:19)

“‘I tell you the truth,’ Jesus answered, ‘before Abraham was born, I am!’” (John 8:58)

“I and the Father are one.” (John 10:30)
Learning how to read and apply the Bible, as teens in the 21st century, is important for your lives, your faith, and your relationships. This is the goal for today and next week.

There are two basic steps to reading the Bible:

1) **Interpretation**: What was the original author trying to say? What meaning was the author trying to convey in the context in which he was writing?

2) **Application**: How can I apply the truths of that passage to my life today?

For the leader: *This next part about the black, white, and red on the page is probably only applicable to an older, more mature group. There is already a lot of info in this week’s lesson, so you may want to skip it for younger groups.*

Here is one helpful method for thinking about interpretation. **It’s called the black, white, and red on the page.**

The **black** on the page refers to literary analysis.
- What is the text saying at face value? (the meaning of the words, grammar, voice, mood, type of speech, etc.)
- This should lead us to the possible meanings.

The **white** on the page refers to context analysis.
- What is the historical context? What was the context of the culture at the time? What is the context within the book of the Bible, and within the greater story of the Bible?
- This should lead us to the probable meanings.

The **red** on the page refers to self-analysis.
- What biases am I reading into this, if any?
- We all come to the Bible with our preformed ideas, beliefs, and worldviews. When we read the Bible, we have to learn to let the Bible challenge our preset beliefs, rather than forcing the Bible to fit into our own worldview.
- Am I seeing red because it is red, or because my lenses are red?
DISCUSSION

Let’s practice some interpretation. We’ll read this passage together and try to answer these questions. Keep in mind that this is something you will eventually begin to do automatically. It’s not as if every time you read the Bible you’ll have to write these out. This is a skill you can learn, and then you’ll begin to do it naturally every time you read the Bible.

Philippians 1:3–6
I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

For the leader: Ask them these questions and see what they can come up with. Some possible answers are provided below for you, but hopefully they can figure most of it out. If you have time, encourage them to Google something about Philippians to learn about context.

What is the text saying? (This is called the black on the page.)
- Paul is praying for the Philippian church.
- He is grateful for their partnership in ministry.
- He is confident that God will complete what he has begun in their church.

What is the context? (This is called the white on the page.)
- Paul is writing from prison.
- The Philippians have sent him food and other goods & he is thanking them.
- Paul is the one who started their church, and he feels an affection toward them and a responsibility for them.

What are my biases? (This is called the red on the page.)
- Do I have a preset belief about whether prayer works?
- Do I have a preset belief that God finishes what he starts?
- Do I have a preset belief that God is good and faithful, or not?

Now that we have this foundation of interpretation, let’s get very practical. The goal of this course is to learn how to read the Bible for yourself, find relevance and meaning in it, and therefore get closer to Jesus.

For the leader: Print out these next two pages and give it to your teens to take home.
A couple pointers for reading the Bible for yourself:

Set a time and place to read, and try to build consistency. It is so much easier if you make a habit than to try to remember fit it into your day.

Have a plan. For instance, I’m reading through the book of James one section at a time.

Pray before, during, and after reading. Remember you aren’t reading this like a school book. This is a love letter from God to you, and you are building a relationship with him—so talk to him!

Pick books that are easier to read and apply to your life, especially at the beginning. The Gospels, most of the letters in the New Testament, and Psalms and Proverbs, are all great places to start.

Ask questions! While you are reading, don’t be afraid to ask questions. You can look them up online in a commentary, or you can ask your youth pastor or your parents if they are believers.

Journal your thoughts and prayers. This may seem like more work, but honestly it is one of the best ways to read the Bible. Do this on your phone, or if you like to write by hand, buy a cool journal. You don’t have to write much. Even a few sentences will help you remember what God is saying. Later you can look back and see thoughts, promises, and prayers coming to life.
S.O.A.P. Method

Scripture
• Pick your passage and read it at face value and watch for God to highlight something to you. Remember to keep in mind the black, white, and red.

Observation
• Pick something that stuck out to you.
• Some questions you can ask yourself are:
  • What is God revealing or highlighting to me?
  • What is touching my heart?
  • What is something I don’t understand?
  • What is something I never knew?
  • What is something that rubs me the wrong way?
  • Is something convicting me—challenging my worldview or how I live my life?

Application
• How can I apply this observation to my life?
• What is one practical thing I can do as a response to what God is showing me through this passage?

Prayer
• Pray the observation or application.
• Turn what God is showing you into a prayer.
• Journal the verse, your thoughts, and your prayer so you can go back and look at it later.
Let’s practice the S.O.A.P. method together. Read the passage that follows together and then as a group work through, and discuss, the four steps.

For the leader: Put this passage up on the screen so they can keep looking at it while you discuss it, or print it out beforehand.

Colossians 3:12–17
Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

If it works with the size of your group, break into groups of two and three and have them pray for whatever God was showing them in the application part. For instance, if God was highlighting humility in that passage, have them minister to each other in line with that.

1. Was the S.O.A.P. method helpful for you? What did you like about it? What did you not like about it?

2. Have you been trying to read more of the Bible since we started talking about it at youth group? How has it been going?

3. What is your favorite way to relate to God? How do you most naturally feel God’s presence, sense his voice, or feel close to him?

4. Would you rather ride a unicorn or a velociraptor?
Week Four:
Each week in this series we will issue an application challenge. The goal is to get all of us reading and becoming more familiar with the Bible.

Read Philippians 3 this week. You can break it into two or three short reads. Use the S.O.A.P. method each time.
There is more than one way to connect with God through the Bible.

Have you ever done a Lectio Divina? If not, and if you are reading this far enough in advance of youth group, it would be really great for you to try it on your own first before teaching it. You can follow the instructions in this lesson. It is another powerful way to connect with God through the Bible.

Make two teams to play “Expose the Secret.” Team 1 goes first. Team 1 takes two minutes to look at team 2 (lined up) and tries to memorize what they look like. Then team 1 leaves the room. Next, team 2 then makes ten changes to their outward appearance (like switching sweatshirts with someone, unzipping a sweatshirt, untying a shoe, etc.). Team 1 returns and gets three minutes to discuss and write down what they think the ten changes are. Then they see if they are right. Next, it is team 2’s turn. The team with the most correct guesses wins.

For our last week in this series we are going to try and accomplish two things:

1. First we are going to take another step in understanding the grand narrative (the big story) of the Bible. Specifically, what themes does the New Testament carry on from the Old Testament, and why are those themes so important?

2. Then we are going to learn and practice another way to read the Bible and get something out of it.

View this video on the Bible Project’s website:
https://thebibleproject.com/explore/new-testament-overview/

What is one thing you learned, or found most interesting, from that video?
Lectio Divina (Latin for “Divine Reading”) (Barton 2006, 59)
This practice is more prayerful and meditative and focuses more on the heart, than the S.O.A.P. method. It also takes a little longer. Choose a passage around six to ten verses long. Try different versions as you read it multiple times.

Preparation (Silencio): Take a short amount of time in silence. This could be as short as 30 seconds, or as long as five minutes. Relax. The goal is to become aware of God’s presence with you, and invite him to speak to you.

Read (Lectio), the first reading: The first reading is usually done out loud. There is something powerful about reading the Scripture out loud. But there is nothing wrong with reading it in your head either. Listen for the word or phrase that is meant for you. After each reading, spend some time in silence meditating on whatever God has highlighted to you. To meditate is to focus on what God is saying to you, to turn the words over in your head, to spend time at peace with what the words are saying. This, again, can be as short as thirty seconds, or as long as five minutes.

Reflect (Meditatio), the second reading: Read the passage again, this time listening with this question in mind: How is my life touched by this word? What is it in my life that needs to hear this word? This can be a different part of the passage than the first reading, or it can be the same. Put yourself in the story. When you are done, spend some time again in quiet just meditating on what this is touching in your life and any connections that are made.

Respond (Oratio), the third reading: Read the passage again, this time with this question in mind: What is my response to God based on what I have read and encountered? Or, what is God inviting me into based on what I’ve read? How will I respond in my life based on what God is highlighting in my heart? This moves into prayer—a conversation with God about what the word or passage is provoking in you. Once again, spend some time in quiet just meditating on what God is saying to you.
For the leader: A traditional Lectio Divina has two more steps. It is up to you if you want to share these. I normally do just the first three readings with a group of teens.

**Rest (Contemplatio):** Read the passage a final time and rest in what God has shown you.

**Resolve (Incarnatio):** Incarnate (live out) the Word of God. This is an internal decision to continue to listen for the rest of the day, and to live out what God has been showing you.

Let’s practice the Lectio Divina together. Then this week, you can try it on your own.

For the leader: You can walk through the four steps as a group with these five verses. Stop after each reading and let people share what God was showing them. This can be really interesting as God tends to speak to each person differently.

Philippians 4:4–9

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

1. Of the two methods for reading the Bible that we’ve practiced, which one did you like better and why?

2. If you could set a few goals for yourself for reading the Bible, what would they be?

3. What questions do you still have about reading the Bible?
Week Five:
Each week in this series we will issue an application challenge. The goal is to get all of us reading and becoming more familiar with the Bible.

Download the Youversion Bible App and choose a Bible reading plan to get you started on a daily practice of reading the Bible!
Here are a few resources you may want to print out and give to your students. You could even spend time as a group going over them online. These tools are all different but helpful in their own way for learning more about the Bible.

**Youversion Bible App**
This app is great for reading the Bible if you prefer digital to having an actual book in your hands. You can read through different versions as well. This app offers some creative reading plans that you can follow one day at a time.

**Biblegateway.com**
This is another helpful website/app for reading the Bible, and it’s a great way to try out different versions.

**Enduringword.com**
I like this guy’s commentary. It’s easy to understand, and I often turn to him when I have questions.

**Thebibleproject.com/explore/**
This site is amazing. Seriously. Anytime you start reading a new book of the Bible, take five minutes and watch the video for that book.

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**Works Cited**


WELCOME TO VINEYARD YOUTH CURRICULUM

Hello friends. What you hold in your hands is the product of lots of people, lots of prayer, and lots of purpose. The Vineyard movement is at a crucial place, and we believe that the work we do with students will have much influence on what the movement will look like over the next 10-20 years. We set out to design a curriculum that communicates and reinforces the biblical and kingdom values of the Vineyard while inviting students to embrace the reality that they are part of something bigger than themselves.

Understanding the diversity within the Vineyard movement, we purposefully designed curriculum that can be utilized by groups of differing sizes led by either paid or volunteer leaders in any geographical setting or location. Easy, right? We believe we accomplish this by offering a buffet of activities that allow you – the in-the-trenches leader – to choose what works for you and your group. We’re pretty sure no one will use all of the material proposed, but we’re confident some of it will be a good fit for your group.

Each lesson includes:

· Experiential, hands-on activities that reflect a variety of learning styles.
· Large group questions to frame a conversation (i.e., not a lecture).
· Application suggestions to reveal and experience the kingdom of God.
· Small group questions each week.
· A devotional for the leader to help them grow in this area.
· Planned activities to help students hear God for themselves.

Why This Topic?

For many teens, reading the Bible can be a confusing and boring exercise. However, the practice of reading the Bible is one of the most foundational practices that followers of Jesus have used for millennia to draw near to God. This curriculum is aimed at helping teens grow in their understanding of the Word of God by answering some of the most often asked questions about the Bible. It then will teach them two methods for reading and applying the Bible, in hopes of launching them on the lifelong practice of reading the Bible.

About the Author

Christian Dunn

Christian and his wife Mandy live with their four amazing kids in Pennsylvania. He has worked in youth ministry for 20 years and has had the pleasure of serving as the leader of East Region Youth Task Force of the Vineyard for 10 of those years. He is currently serving as the National Youth Director for VUSA, and recently planted CityLight Vineyard Church in Newark, DE. He is the author of “Finding the One: How Dating Prepares You For Marriage” and “More Than Spectators: Empowering Teens for Ministry.” He is excited about imparting to young people a passion for following Jesus, discovering their gifts, and pursuing their ministry callings.