

Men of the Word

The Good News



A Bible Study for Men

The Knights of Columbus Presents

Men of the Word

The Good News

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**Catholic Information Service
Knights of Columbus Supreme Council**

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Men of the Word Bible Study

"For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart." (Hebrews 4:12)

As Catholic men, we know that the world is pulling us in directions contrary to God's plans for our lives. Men today are often swept away in a sea of secularism which offers only false ideas of what it means to be a man and what men should aspire to be. It is easy to lose sight of who God has called us to be when we are surrounded by a world that has other priorities.

The noise of our culture drowns out the still, small voice of God, but God has so much more to offer us than the superficial, and ultimately unsatisfying, ideas of masculinity that the world presents. It is our responsibility, then, to turn back, again and again, to God's Word, letting him speak directly to our hearts, to examine our lives in the light of Sacred Scripture, and to follow after the example of Jesus Christ, who shows us how to live as sons of the Father.

To reorient ourselves, with Christ as our north star, it will require us to start at the very beginning and to remember the overarching story of salvation: from creation to our own lives. This Bible Study will offer an opportunity for us to become Men of the Word by taking a step back to see the big picture of the Gospel – the Good News that Jesus Christ brought to all of humanity – and to allow that Good News to speak into our lives. This is a foundational study to help us understand our place in God's story and to see the world through the eyes of faith.

In order for us, as Catholic men, to fully live out what God is calling us to be and to do, we must have a deep knowledge of, and relationship with, Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh. Our lives can be transformed by encountering him through the written Word of God so that we can go out and share the Good News we have received.

How to use this Bible Study

The *Men of the Word* Bible Study by the Knights of Columbus contains 12 meeting sessions for a group of men to work through together. It is designed in particular for Knights of Columbus *Cor* meetings but can be used by any men's group or ministry that meets regularly. Your group should meet at least monthly, but biweekly or weekly meetings would be even more beneficial for the sake of consistency.

Of the twelve meeting sessions, eight are regular study sessions and four are guided *Lectio Divina* sessions (see page vi for more information). Every third session will be dedicated to guided *lectio divina* in order to deepen the study of Scripture through an experience of prayer.

This study is not an attempt to offer you a complete guide to the Bible; rather, this study will present the *kerygma*, or essential preaching of the Good News, by walking through key moments of Salvation History. There is so much more to discover and learn, but what is included here is a foundation.

MEETING SESSION OUTLINE

Session 1: The Good News

Session 2: Created for Good

Session 3: *Lectio Divina* – The Good Man

Session 4: Fallen through Sin

Session 5: God's Divine Rescue

Session 6: *Lectio Divina* – The Fallen Man

Session 7: Jesus – Incarnate Teacher

Session 8: Jesus – Crucified Savior

Session 9: *Lectio Divina* – The Blessed Man

Session 10: Jesus – Resurrected Lord

Session 11: Invitation to Discipleship

Session 12: *Lectio Divina* – The Redeemed Man

Meeting Structure

Each of the regular study sessions includes 6 key parts with some additional, optional elements:

- I. Session Introduction – Key themes to pay attention to during the readings are discussed in a session introduction. The participants can read the introduction before the meeting, read it aloud together, or have a member of the group summarize the key points for the rest of the group before getting started. **5 Minutes*
- II. Opening Prayer – The same opening prayer begins each session. Before praying, it would be appropriate to ask the group if anyone has any particular intentions that they would wish to pray for. **5 Minutes*
- III. Reading Scripture – Either one extended passage or several shorter passages of Scripture are listed to read aloud together. **Each member should bring their own Bible to the group or a group leader should be prepared with extra Bibles.** For each passage, there are one or more short questions to answer. These should be short discussions to make sure that everyone has understood the main idea of the passage. Appendix A at the back of this book includes some key points for each passage in case your group is unsure about any of the questions. **20 Minutes*
- IV. Applying Scripture – Three or four longer questions that are meant to get to the heart of issues particularly faced by men. These may be more personal or reflective and will require more openness from the group. **It is perfectly acceptable if the group is only able to get through one of these questions because of the extended conversation it draws out as long as the conversation is staying on topic and relevant to the participants.** **20 Minutes*
- V. Call to Action – An opportunity to apply what you discussed in the session to daily life. Each session has a suggestion of how to do this, but participants can also decide on another based on what the group discussed and learned. **5 Minutes*
- VI. Closing Prayer – Each session ends with the same closing prayer. **5 Minutes*
**Sample expected time for a one-hour meeting*

Other Structural Elements:

- Each session includes quotations from the Catechism of the Catholic Church, saints, and popes. These are included to help us learn to read Scripture with the mind of the Church.
- Each session includes some extended explanations of key ideas or parts of Scripture. These are supplemental and will be helpful, especially for anyone who is studying the Bible for the first time.
- Each session includes a brief list of additional readings that participants may want to read at home after meeting. These will follow similar themes and ideas discussed in the session and will show the incredible unity of Scripture.

Important notes about this Bible Study:

- Each participant should come with his own Bible or the group should be prepared to provide one for every man in the group. **For this study, it is recommended that you use either the New American Bible – Revised Edition (NAB-RE), the New Revised Standard Version – Catholic Edition (NRSV-CE), the Revised Standard Version – Catholic Edition (RSV-CE) or the English Standard Version - Catholic Edition (ESV-CE).**
- This study is designed to allow men to join at any time – you do not need to wait for a new study to start. If new members are present, it may be helpful to summarize some of what your group has already covered.
- To allow for the best discussions, groups should not be more than 8 men. This means that if you have a larger group coming together for the Bible Study, the large group should divide into smaller groups.
- There is no assigned reading to do at home before coming to the group; however, reading the passages from Scripture beforehand will certainly not hurt the experience of the study.
- The structure of the four *Lectio Divina* sessions is completely different from the other meetings. Please see page vi for a further explanation.

How to Lead a Small Group Session

A small group session is an opportunity for a group to gather and discuss their thoughts, questions, and takeaways from a shared conversation that begins and ends with prayer. The task of a small group leader is to facilitate and direct the conversation, elicit contributions from all willing participants, resolve any conflicts that may arise, and summarize what is discussed. As a small group leader, you are not asked to teach, but to make sure the conversation stays focused and respectful and includes all participants. A small group is successful when there is meaningful discussion that helps people connect with each other and apply the concepts and themes to their daily life. You do not have to cover 100 percent of the material or questions. This is a framework for you to build upon that best meets the needs of the group you are leading.

General Tips to Lead a Small Group Session

Review and reflect before the session. As the small group discussion leader, make sure you review and reflect on the reading ahead of the session to familiarize yourself with the content.

Bring pens and paper. Consider providing paper and writing implements for the participants.

Ask questions that invite the men to reflect on their experience. These small groups are designed for reflection, not a quiz on the content. Avoid yes-or-no questions unless you have a thought-provoking follow-up question. Make it comfortable for men to share their personal stories, but don't try to force them to do so.

Listen well. To facilitate a discussion, a leader must understand what everyone is saying. Sometimes it's easy to begin formulating your own response while another person is speaking, but that can compromise how well you are listening.

Rephrase, repeat, summarize, clarify. Together with listening skills, use these techniques to ensure each contribution to the discussion is heard and understood. Sometimes rephrasing a participant's idea to a sentence or two will help others in the room understand his or her contribution. Summarizing the course of the discussion occasionally will also help ensure that everyone processes what has been said as a group and encourage them to take the discussion to the next level.

Include all participants. In any group discussion, some members will speak up willingly, perhaps even dominating the conversation, while others will tend to be quiet. Not everyone processes information the same way or at the same speed. Some may need you to encourage them to share. Respect those who take time to process and who may not be as inclined to share.

Adapt the questions. Be aware throughout the small group discussion that the people in the group might be in different stages in their lives. In such instances, adapt the question or encourage the participants to adapt their reflections accordingly.

Return to questions later if the answer is not known. If a particular question arises in a session involving Church teaching and the correct answer is not known, you can simply state you will ask your chaplain or pastor, or look to the Catechism, for clarification and share the answer during the next session.

Keep emotional discipline and mediate conflict. Some topics can be sensitive, so be prepared to diffuse anger and redirect the discussion in a constructive way. Diffuse the situation and help the disputing members find common ground or principles. If necessary, simply table the issue that is causing the tensions and move along to a new topic.

Know when it's time to advance the discussion. Moving a discussion forward too soon can lead to missing some good observations or contributions, but keeping a discussion going on too long can make the session boring or repetitive. Be mindful of how the discussion is progressing; when it seems to stall, it's time to move it forward.

Seek help when necessary. Sometimes, questions and situations occur that require outside assistance. A participant might have a particularly difficult question, require fraternal correction, or argue against Church teaching. In situations like this, it is best to talk to the participant out of the group setting. Most importantly, remember that it is best to reach out to your pastor for help in a situation you are uncomfortable with.

End with an invitation. If there are more group sessions to come, re-invite the members of the group and remind them of the date and time. Participants should also be encouraged to invite other men to join the group. These personal invitations offer the small group another opportunity to develop their faith. An invitation is especially important following your last small group.

Lectio Divina

The words of Sacred Scripture were not written to remain imprisoned on papyrus, parchment or paper, but to be received by a person who prays, making them blossom in his or her heart.

Pope Francis

Let [all the Christian Faithful] remember that prayer should accompany the reading of Sacred Scripture, so that God and man may talk together; for “we speak to Him when we pray; we hear Him when we read the divine saying.”

Dei Verbum, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, Vatican II

It is one thing to study Sacred Scripture, it is quite another to pray with Sacred Scripture. It can be easy to study Scripture, learning names, dates, and historical or literary facts, without letting the Word of God affect your heart. The Word of God is “living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Heb 4:12), so we must approach it with an openness that allows us to encounter Jesus Christ in the written words of Scripture.

This Bible Study will give you the opportunity both to study the Bible and to pray with Scripture in order to allow God to speak to you. Every third session in this Study will be a guided *lectio divina* session during which you and your group will look back at passages that you have studied previously and give God the time to speak to you through them. *Lectio Divina* (Latin for “Divine Reading”) is a prayerful approach to reading the Bible that Christians have used to pray with Scripture for centuries. It was developed in the monastic tradition, but, particularly after the Second Vatican Council, all Catholics have been encouraged to pray *lectio divina* “which is truly ‘capable of opening up to the faithful the treasures of God’s word, but also of bringing about an encounter with Christ, the living word of God.’”¹

Over the years, a simple outline for *lectio divina* has been adopted and it contains four key steps. For better guidance, we have added several additional steps to make this easier to pray as a group. This introduction will briefly review these steps and each *Lectio* session will provide guidance for a group leader to facilitate the session.

¹ Pope Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Verbum Domini*, 87

Preparation

- A. Before beginning *lectio divina*, select a passage that you will be praying with. It should not be too long, and it should be one that you are somewhat familiar with. For the *lectio* sessions in this Study, the passages have been selected based on readings you will have already done in the Study.
- B. When praying *lectio divina* in a group, choose a facilitator and assign people different reading roles. This is also a good time to indicate to the group what they should expect during this session and how this time of prayer will flow.
- C. Make sure that your group is in a comfortable space that is conducive to prayer. If it is an option and is not disruptive to others, it would be appropriate to do this in a chapel or church with your pastor's permission.

Lectio Divina

- A. Begin by placing yourself in the presence of God. Allow for the group to sit in silence before God. If it is helpful, focus on your breathing and allow distractions to pass out of your mind.
 - B. Ask the Holy Spirit to be present and to open your heart to the Word of God. Ask Mary, the Mother of the Word made flesh, to guide you to her Son who is made known to us in the Sacred Scriptures.
1. **LECTIO [Reading]** - Begin *Lectio Divina* with a slow, but natural, reading of the passage of Scripture. While the passage is being read, each person should be listening attentively and asking themselves, "What does the biblical text say in itself?" After a few moments of silence, the passage should be read a second time and even a third time if desired.
 2. **MEDITATIO [Meditation]** – During a period of silence, begin to ask yourself, "what does the biblical text say to *me*?" Is there a word or sentence that sticks out to you? Is God trying to say something directly to you as you are reading? It is important to remain faithful to the text itself and allow it to move and challenge you.
 3. **ORATIO [Prayer]** – This is your response to God's Word and to what was happening during the *meditatio* step previously. What do you have to say back to God? Words of petition, intercession, thanksgiving, praise? This too can be done in a period of silence with only limited guidance from the facilitator of the group.
 4. **CONTEMPLATIO [Contemplation]** – Allow God to show you his own vision and ask yourself, "What conversion of mind, heart, and life is the Lord asking of me?" Sit in silence and be open to how the Word of God can transform your life. Pope Francis describes this part of *lectio divina* by saying, "Words and thoughts here give way to love, as between lovers for whom sometimes it is enough to just look at each other in silence. The biblical text remains, but like a mirror, like an icon to be contemplated. And in this way, there is dialogue."² This period of prayer should be as long as needed for each individual.

² Pope Francis, General Audience, Wednesday 27 January 2021

Discussion



- A. Conclude your *lectio divina* with a prayer of thanksgiving, but do not lose the prayerful atmosphere of your group.
- B. Open up a period of time for sharing with one another what you experienced during prayer. Invite the members of your group to share what words or phrases stuck out during the *lectio* and *meditatio* parts of the prayer. If people are comfortable, invite them to share more of what God spoke to them in prayer and what they said back to God.
- C. Spend time discussing what concrete decision or action you will take in response to your time in prayer with God. Pope Benedict XVI tells us, “We do well also to remember that the process of *lectio divina* is not concluded until it arrives at action (*actio*), which moves the believer to make his or her life a gift for others in charity.”³
- D. Conclude your discussion with a prayer.

In each *Lectio* Session in this Bible Study, these steps will be clearly identified, and there will be guidance for a facilitator to lead the group through *lectio divina*. If this is your first time praying in this way, it may at times feel awkward, especially with the amount of silence that is required. The more you pray with Scripture and as a group, the more comfortable you will be.

³ Pope Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini* 87

Session One: The Good News

Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law. (Psalm 119:18)



Session One: The Good News

HOW CAN WE UNDERSTAND SACRED SCRIPTURE?

Session Introduction

As we begin a study of the Bible – God’s word to us – it can help to remind ourselves why we are so interested in reading and understanding Scripture. To answer that question, we might ask another: what is the essence of Christianity? What is the heart of our religion? Here are some possible answers to that question that touch an aspect of our faith without getting to its core.

- Christianity is a high moral code, a way to be a good person. Love one another. Don’t lie, cheat, or steal;
- Christianity is a philosophy of life, a developed body of thought about the meaning of the universe and our place in it.
- Christianity is a humanitarian plan for the betterment of society, an effort to eradicate hunger, abolish slavery, and bring about justice.
- Christianity is a set of rituals and prayers that connect us to God.

If none of these are the core of the faith, what is? What is it that has made Christianity the most universal religion on earth, that has riveted the hearts and minds of people from every country, every ethnic group, every people, and every time period since it first was proclaimed to the world 2,000 years ago?

The surprising answer is that at the heart of Christianity is not some idea or philosophy; rather, it is the person of Jesus Christ and the story of how much God has loved us. It is a tale of action, adventure, and love – the extraordinary tale of what God has done with and for humanity. It is the story of how God created each of us with a great purpose; how humanity rejected him and brought the curse of death upon ourselves; how we found ourselves enslaved by dark powerful beings far stronger than us; and how – beyond all hope – he took our human nature upon himself, came among us, and in an act of extravagant generosity, carried off our guilt, freed us from the Devil’s slavery, brought us back to life, and gave us the opportunity to respond and accept his invitation to follow after him.

It is the story of all of humanity, but it is also the story of each of our lives, which is why we can recognize it as the story behind every story, the adventure that we seek in every adventure, the divine and human drama that provides us with the key for understanding who we are, why we are alive, and how we should live. And the most wonderful thing about this story is that it happens to be true. Christianity is the true tale of a dead humanity being brought back to life by the power of God’s love. The other important aspects of the faith flow from that truth and take their place within it.

Much of what it means to be converted is to understand God's vision of the world, to take on the mind of Christ. To be a Christian is to take our place in the cosmic story that God has been writing and to embrace the special role he has crafted for each of us. If we want to know where that story is told, the paramount answer would be: the Sacred Scriptures. It is there that we find what has always been called "salvation history." It is there that we meet the person of Jesus, that we hear his words, see his actions, and are swept into the current of God's divine plan. That's why the Church has so loved the Scriptures, why they hold such a prominent place in our life and liturgy, why St. Jerome, the great biblical scholar, could say, "To be ignorant of the Scriptures is to be ignorant of Christ."

Catechism of the Catholic Church, 96-97

What Christ entrusted to the apostles, they in turn handed on by their preaching and writing, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to all generation, until Christ returns in glory. "Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture make up a single sacred deposit of the Word of God" (*Dei Verbum*, 10) in which, as in a mirror, the pilgrim Church contemplates God, the source of all her riches.

I. Opening Prayer

Pray together as a group:

*O Lord Jesus Christ, open the eyes of my heart that I may hear your Word,
and understand and do your will.*

*Do not hide your commandments from me, but open my eyes,
that I may perceive the wonders of your Law.*

Speak to me the hidden and secret things of your wisdom.

*On you I set my hope, O my God,
that you shall enlighten my mind and understanding with the light of your knowledge;
not only to cherish those things which are written, but to do them;
For you are the enlightenment of those who lie in darkness,
and from you comes every good deed and every gift.
Amen.*

II. Reading Scripture

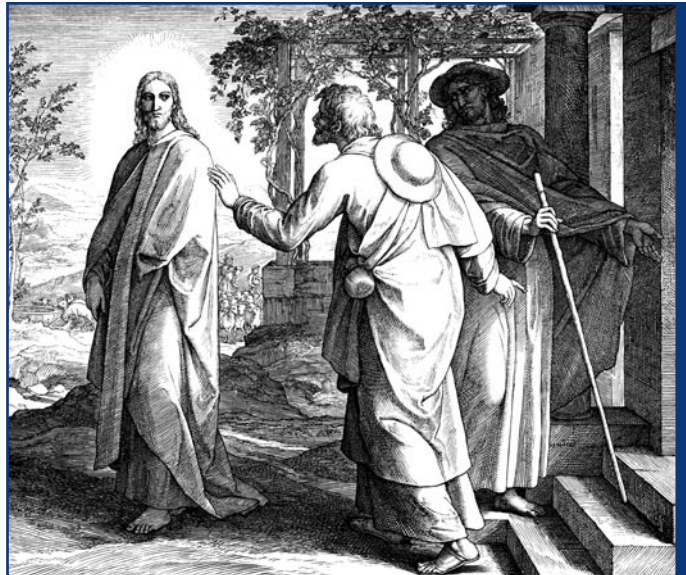
Read aloud as a group the following passages.

After reading each passage, answer the questions together in order to draw out some of the key ideas.

Some main ideas for each passage are listed in the back of this book to help with your discussion if needed.

1. Luke 4:16-22

(Jesus in the synagogue)



- Describe in your own words what is happening in this passage.
- What connection does Jesus make between himself and the passage from the Old Testament?
- What is he claiming to fulfill?
- What is the role that the Sacred Scriptures play in Jesus's explanation of his identity and his call?
- How do people react to his proclamation?

2. Luke 24:13-32 (The Road to Emmaus)

- Describe in your own words what is happening in this passage.
- What does Jesus explain to the disciples on the road?
- What is the reaction of the two disciples when they heard the Scriptures explained by Jesus? What do they say about it afterwards?
- What was the moment when they realized who they were with?

3. Acts 8:26-40 (Philip and the Ethiopian official)

- Describe in your own words what is happening in this passage.
- Why is the Ethiopian official struggling to understand the Scripture passage that he is reading?
- What does Philip proclaim to him through the Scripture passage?
- What is the Ethiopian official's response?

Catechism of the Catholic Church, 140

The unity of the two Testaments proceeds from the unity of God's plan and his Revelation. The Old Testament prepares for the New and the New Testament fulfills the Old; the two shed light on each other; both are true Word of God.

III. Applying Scripture

Based on your reading, discuss the following questions as they apply to your life. Depending on how much time you have available, you may not be able to discuss all of these questions. If necessary, choose one question to discuss in a significant way.

- 1 For many Catholic men, the stories of the Bible can lose their impact or meaning, especially if we have heard them many times over the course of our lives. It is easy to think of them as just nice stories or historical context without considering that they are speaking to us – that we are being spoken to and about. **Have you ever approached Sacred Scripture in a way that applies directly to your life? What are some ways that Scripture has spoken to you in your life? Can you imagine yourself as one of the disciples on the road to Emmaus or as the Ethiopian official from the Acts of the Apostles? What would be your reaction in those situations?**

- 2 In the synagogue of Nazareth, Jesus boldly proclaimed liberty to captives and freedom for the oppressed. This is the Good News that he brought to humanity, and, as we will see through this Bible study, this is the great plan that he accomplished through his death and Resurrection. This good news only makes sense if we acknowledge the “bad news” first – that humanity was captive and oppressed by sin, death, and the devil. **Can you recognize that this also applies to your life? Do you see parts of your life that need to hear the Good News that Jesus brings? If Jesus were speaking these words directly to you, what would your reaction be?**

- 3 Although the Bible is a collection of many different books, God is speaking a single story through the entire collection of writings. It can be easy to get lost among individual stories without keeping the big picture in mind. **What are some of your favorite stories or books from the Bible? Do you feel confident understanding how they fit in with the big picture of Sacred Scripture? What questions do you have about Scripture that you hope this Bible Study might answer?**

- 4 For Catholics, there is a deep connection between Sacred Scripture and the celebration of the Mass. At every Mass, the Church presents to us a series of readings from Scripture, the Word of God, before we receive Jesus, the Word of God, in the Eucharist. **How might your experience of Mass be changed by a deeper understanding of the Bible? Can you place yourself in the shoes of the disciples in Emmaus who recognized Jesus in “the breaking of the bread”, that is, the Eucharist?**

IV. Call to Action

Write down for yourself one concrete way that you are going to apply today's Scripture Study to your life.

Example:

Read the Scripture readings before going to Mass on Sunday so that you are more prepared. If you are unsure where to find the readings go to bible.usccb.org and select the date of the next upcoming Sunday.

V. Closing Prayer

Pray together:

*Lord God, let us keep your Scriptures in mind
and meditate on them day and night,
persevering in prayer, always on watch.
We beg you, Lord, to give us real knowledge of what we read,
and to show us not only how to understand it,
but how to put it into practice,
and to obtain spiritual gifts
enlightened by the teaching of the Holy Spirit,
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
whose power and glory will endure throughout all ages.
Amen.*

ON READING THE BIBLE

A supplemental note for further study

Reading the Bible is unlike reading any other book. The Bible is God's word, which means not only that it is utterly reliable, but that he himself inhabits it and speaks in and through it. God's word is alive and is always seeking, searching, and eagerly looking for a heart and a mind that wants to be formed by it. To read the Sacred Scripture is to come face to face with God. It demands seriousness and reverence.

God's Word will change the life of anyone who comes to it with humility and desire. Always. Without fail. This truth is both heartening and perilous. If you do not want your life to change, you had better stay away from the Sacred Scriptures. On the other hand, if you want to experience a continuing transformation and an ever-deeper insertion into the life of God, reading Sacred Scripture is just where you should be. *"Our God is a consuming fire."* (Hebrews 12:29)

Reading the Bible is both easy and difficult. How is it easy? Sacred Scripture is meant for all of us, and Christ will speak to the mind and heart of each of his sons and daughters as they come to him in his Word, illuminating his meaning and imparting grace through the Holy Spirit. Much of Scripture is interesting and immediately moving to us. How is it hard? There is a lot in Scripture whose meaning is not apparent on its surface, and there are important things that can be easily missed or misunderstood. That is why we always read the Bible with the Church, meaning that we plunge into the two-thousand-year stream of reading and understanding that comes to us from Christ and the apostles, that has been guided by the Holy Spirit, and that has been enriched and deepened by countless saints and doctors of the Church. The Lord will speak to each of us very personally through the Scriptures, but he reveals the truth of his Word to the Church as a whole.

Digging into Sacred Scripture involves setting ourselves to do some good hard work. Like everything that is worth anything, it demands an investment of time, attention, and serious-mindedness. If we come to the Bible with a casual and lackluster attitude, we will get little from the exercise, like playing a competitive sport distractedly and not caring much about what you are doing. At the same time, though it requires focus and energy, studying Scripture is a richly rewarding task. As St. Peter said to Jesus: *"You have the words of eternal life"* (John 6:68). God's Word lifts and inspires us even as we are putting in the needed work.

So we should be ready to roll up our sleeves and exercise our minds and spirits. Let us put behind us anything of laziness, or irreverence, or boyish nonchalance. Let us tackle it like men and be ready to allow God's living Word to sift and sort us, as he burns away the slag in our hearts and minds and forges us into the gold he so desires.

Additional Readings from Scripture

These optional readings build on the themes discussed in this session. You are encouraged to read and pray with them on your own in between this meeting and the next.

Psalm 119: 103-105 *“How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”* The Old Testament is filled with passages that express delight in the truth and goodness of God’s word.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 *“All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”* St. Paul here teaches that the Scriptures come from the hand of God himself and are essential for coming to spiritual maturity.

1 Peter 1:3-5 *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and to an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.”* St. Peter begins his letter with the basic story line of Christianity: we who were dead have been brought to life by Christ, and are awaiting the full expression of our new life.

Matthew 7:13-14 *“Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few.”* Jesus speaks here of life as a road, and one with only two destinations. He also makes clear that the road leading to life is not obvious, and can be easily missed.

Facilitator Notes: Key Discussion Points



Key Discussion Points for Session One:

Brief summaries of the passages and the key truths that can be drawn out of them. Consult these as needed to help guide your group discussion.

Luke 4:16-22

- We should sense the drama of this passage: Jesus has been living into his middle age among a few hundred people, all of whom are relatives, friends, or people who have known him and seen him grow up among them. To this point they have not seen anything exceptional or special in him. Then Jesus leaves town, goes to other towns and villages, and begins to do very remarkable things. The townspeople hear about it and wonder what is happening with the hometown boy. He comes, is given the task of being a reader, does his reading, and then calmly announces that the one all of Israel has been waiting for is... himself. This is a thunderclap of an announcement.
- Here as always, Jesus interprets his behavior to those around him by using the Scriptures. He is God among us, the center of human history, and he makes clear that the Scriptures are God's gift to help humanity understand who God is and what he is up to with them.
- The importance of the narrative is evident here. Jesus is announcing the fulfillment of "salvation history," the story of God's pursuit of a wayward humanity. He calls each of his disciples to enter the same story and to take their place within it.
- Beyond this passage, the people of Nazareth reject Jesus and drive him out of town. There is an understanding of mission that requires being steadfast in the midst of rejection.



Luke 24:13-32

- The conversation on the road to Emmaus is among the most charming, as well as enlightening, episodes in the Gospels. Here, as elsewhere, Jesus is not necessarily immediately recognizable even by his close friends. He is clearly there, but his identity is hidden from them. As they grapple with the events of the crucifixion and reported resurrection, he undertakes to explain to them what is going on. The way he does it is by going to the Scriptures. We should take the cue: if we want to understand who Jesus is and what he has been accomplishing, we will find it by studying God's word.
- This might be called the first post-Resurrection Mass. There is a liturgy of the Word and a liturgy of the Eucharist. In the first Jesus imparts understanding toward the conversion of mind; in the second, in the breaking of the bread, they recognize his presence and meet him anew. What happened then is meant to happen at every celebration of the Mass.

- Looking back at this encounter, these two disciples recognize that their hearts were burning within them as Jesus opened the Scriptures for them. The words of Sacred Scripture cut us to the heart and speak directly to us.
- When they stopped for the day, it was too late to allow their companion to continue on his journey, but when Jesus revealed himself, the two disciples immediately returned back to Jerusalem that night. There is an urgency about encountering Jesus that demands immediate action and a desire to share the Good News with others.

Acts 8:26-40

- Notice who is driving the action of this passage: Philip is urged by an angel of the Lord and by the Holy Spirit to speak to the Ethiopian court official. Philip's openness to hearing the promptings of the Lord allowed him to share the Gospel.
- The Ethiopian official was reading the Hebrew Scriptures, the prophet Isaiah, but did not understand the passage. In particular, he did not know about whom the passage was referring and he did not have a teacher to guide him. When approaching Sacred Scripture, we do not read it on our own. Rather, we have the teaching and guidance of the Church to show us and interpret for us, which is exactly what the Ethiopian official receives from Philip.
- Philip uses this opportunity to "proclaim Jesus to him". The questions the official had are answered in the person of Jesus Christ, who is the fulfillment of what we call today the Old Testament. When we approach Scripture we must keep in mind that the interpretative lens that allows us to understand all of Scripture as a whole is the person of Jesus.



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