

Using the Bible with Children¹

First Grade:

- By midyear, children will read simple verses.
- By the end of the year, children will know there are two main parts; one (the Old Testament, or Hebrew Scriptures) is about people and events before Jesus was born; and one is about Jesus, his followers, and the early church (the New Testament).
- By the end of the year, children will know the names of the four Gospels and be able to state that the word “gospel” means good news.

Second Grade:

- Children will read simple passages aloud as well as sections in Bible storybooks.
- Children will recognize that the Bible is about God, Jesus, and the relationships God has with people and the rest of creation.
- Children will begin to be able to identify stories as being from the Old Testament or the New Testament.
- Children will be introduced to the fact that the Bible contains different types of literature, such as history, stories, letters, laws, and psalms, which are poems that were often sung as part of worship.

Third Grade:

- Children will be able to look up verses.
- Children will recognize some of the common abbreviations for books of the Bible.
- Near the end of the year, children will be introduced to cross-reference notes.

Fourth Grade:

- Children will be introduced to concordances and Bible dictionaries.
- Children will know how to use cross-reference notes.

Fifth Grade:

- Children will use Bible atlases.
- Children will identify Bible books by type.

Sixth Grade:

- Children will develop mastery with concordances, dictionaries, and atlases.
- Children will be introduced to the history of the Bible and its development.

¹From *Children Among Us: Foundations in Children's Ministries*. Edited by Cassandra Williams. Witherspoon Press, 2003, pages 126–127.

Using the Bible with Youth

Youth, as with other age groups, come with a variety of gifts and Bible skills. Some have been in Sunday school from an early age, know basic Bible stories, and have some Bible skills. They are comfortable handling the Bible and feel that they know something about its contents. Other teens may be very unfamiliar with the Bible. They may not know the basic stories or how to locate texts. They need to practice and feel comfortable as they gain new skills.

Regardless of the abilities of the students, it is important to use the Bible in non-threatening, relevant ways. Youth are eager to know more about the mysteries of God and the Bible, but they need to wrestle with their faith without being embarrassed in front of their peers.

The Opening Doors to Discipleship training module for teachers of teens¹ says this about how youth want to study the Bible:

- We want to start with our own life situations, then move to what the Bible is teaching us
- We want teachers who don't tell us the "answer" but guide us in finding it for ourselves
- Some of us are ready to do some serious Bible study using background helps, atlases and commentaries.

We Believe: God's Word for God's People survey courses establish faith goals and Congregational Ministries Publishing youth curriculum² frames questions from teens.

Middle School

To become familiar with basic foundational stories of the Old and New Testaments
To learn the major themes of the Bible through an overview course
To become familiar with Christian, Reformed, Presbyterian Church history
To explore the meaning and responsibilities of church membership

High School

To introduce biblical metaphors and imagery
To engage in a wide range of theological questions
To create a classroom that is safe and shows openness to listen to their opinions and questions
To provide for sacred moments
To help them identify and learn to value the gifts God has given them
To channel their gifts for service to the church community and world

The most important tip is to use the Bible with teens, helping them to discover the beauty, wisdom, and powerful story of God as revealed in Scripture.

¹ From *Opening Doors to Discipleship*, Course A: Resources for Session 2, Faith at Various Ages—Teens. Site provided by the Presbyterian Reformed Educational Partners (PREP).

² From *We Believe: God's Word for God's People* Survey Courses and Faith Questions. Copyright © Congregational Ministries Publishing (CMP), Louisville, KY.

Using the Bible with Adults

Using the Bible with adults can be as challenging as helping teens study the Bible. Adult Bible skills and comfort levels vary widely. Some adults in a congregation are born and raised in a Christian home. They are lifelong members of a Presbyterian or other Christian denomination. These adults consider the Bible an old friend.

Other adults may be lifelong attendees or members, but have not attended church school regularly, participated in Christian education, or explored the Bible on a deeper level. Some adults are coming to faith and discovering the Bible for the first time. We cannot make assumptions about biblical literacy.

When teaching or studying the Bible with adults, it is important to plan experiences that deepen and challenge their faith, but also consider the variety of skill levels. Incorporate different activities to address the many ways adults learn. Like children or youth, adults should feel excited, not threatened, when studying the Bible.

The free online teacher training resource, *Opening Doors to Discipleship*, offers information about how adults learn. It also provides suggestions¹ for using the Bible with adults. Course A: Teaching Skills, Sessions 3 and 4, will be of particular interest for those who are called to teach and lead adult Bible study. These materials use multiple intelligences for adults and a variety of Bible study methods. Consider using Course B: Bible Background for a twelve-session overview of Scripture in the Reformed tradition.

Donald L. Griggs, author and well-known Christian educator, in his two books *The Bible from Scratch: The Old Testament for Beginners* and *The Bible from Scratch: The New Testament for Beginners* offer an excellent chapter in each book, “Introducing the Bible.” When starting a new study group, Griggs suggests that participants complete a “Bible Skills and Tools Inventory” or similar instrument. The group leader compiles the information for the whole group, assessing Bible skills in a non-judgmental way. As necessary, the teacher helps students become familiar with and engaged with the whole Bible—its organization and its revelations for life.

The other aspect of Bible study that Griggs teaches and incorporates so well in all of his writings and teachings is the pray/reflect/respond model³ that he calls “Prayer Prompted by Scripture” in *The Bible from Scratch* books. Adults are asked to read a passage and meditate on its meaning, responding to questions provided or that arise out of the text.

Whether using inductive Bible study, in depth exegesis of a passage, or praying the Scripture through *lectio divina*, immerse adults in opportunities to dwell in the Bible. Like younger learners, adults want to discover the relevance of Scripture for their busy lives.

¹ *Opening Doors to Discipleship*, Course A: Teaching Skills, Sessions 3 and 4, and Course B: Bible Background. Site provided by the Presbyterian Reformed Educational Partners (PREP) at openingdoorstodiscipleship.com.

² *The Bible from Scratch: The Old Testament for Beginners* or *The New Testament for Beginners* by Donald L. Griggs. Westminster John Knox Press, 2002. Louisville, KY.

³ *The Bible from Scratch: The Old Testament for Beginners* or *The New Testament for Beginners* by Donald L. Griggs, pages 3, 11, 20, etc. Westminster John Knox Press, 2002. Louisville, KY.