

7SP3A - How to Read the Holy Bible

Objective:

The aim of this lesson is to plant a seed in the kids life of the importance of daily reading of the Holy Bible. Our overall aim is to instill in all our kids a love for the Bible and also a dependence on the Holy Bible.

Memory Verse:

“How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth”

Psalms 119:103

Introduction:

There is an essential difference between the word of man and the word of God. Man’s word echoes in the air and disappears. However, the word of God is living and active. How can written words in the Bible be living and active? What does it mean for a book to actually be called the Living Word?

Lesson Outline:

Saint Tikhon of Zadonsk, writing in eighteenth-century Russia, has this to say about our Orthodox attitude towards the Holy Scriptures: “If an earthly king, our emperor, wrote you a letter, would you not read it with joy? Certainly! With great rejoicing and careful attention. You have been sent a letter, not by any earthly emperor, but by the King of Heaven. And yet you almost despise such a gift, so priceless a treasure.” He goes on to say: “Whenever you read the Gospel, Christ Himself is speaking to you. And while you read, you are praying and talking to Him.”

We are to see Scripture as a personal letter addressed specifically to each one of us by God. We are each of us to see Scripture reading as a direct, individual dialogue between Christ and ourselves.

“The Scriptures constitute a coherent whole. They are at once divinely inspired and humanly expressed. They bear authoritative witness to God’s revelation of Himself—in creation, in the Incarnation of the Word, and the whole history of salvation. And as such they express the word of God in human language. . . . We know, receive, and interpret Scripture through the Church and in the Church. Our approach to the Bible is one of obedience.”

We may distinguish four key qualities which mark an Orthodox reading of Scripture. First, our reading should be obedient. Second, it should be ecclesial, within the Church. Third, it should be Christ-centered. Fourth, it should be personal.

1) Reading the Bible with Obedience

First of all, when reading Scripture, we are to listen in a spirit of obedience. The Bible is divinely inspired. The Scripture is a letter from God. Christ Himself is speaking. The Scriptures are God's authoritative witness of Himself. They express the Word of God in our human language. Since God Himself is speaking to us in the Bible, our response should be one of obedience, of awe and attentiveness. As we read, we wait on the Spirit.

2) Understanding the Bible Through the Church

It is the Church that tells us what is Scripture, and it is equally the Church that tells us how Scripture is to be understood. Coming upon the Ethiopian as he read the Old Testament in his chariot, Philip the Apostle asked him, "Do you understand what you are reading?" And the Ethiopian answered, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" (Acts 8:30, 31). We are all in the position of the Ethiopian. The words of Scripture are not always self-explanatory. God speaks directly to the heart of each one of us as we read our Bible—Scripture reading is, as Saint Tikhon says, a personal dialogue between each one and Christ—but we also need guidance. And our guide is the Church. We make full use of our own personal understanding, assisted by the Spirit, we make full use of the findings of modern biblical research, but always we submit private opinion—whether our own or that of the scholars—to the total experience of the Church throughout the ages.

3) Christ, the Heart of the Bible

The third element in our reading of Scripture is that it should be *Christ-centered*. It was quoted "The Scriptures constitute a coherent whole," where are we to locate this unity and coherence? In the person of Christ. He is the unifying factor that runs through the entirety of the Holy Bible, from the first sentence to the last. People may think that it is hard to see Christ in the pages of the Old Testament. But when you read the prophecies in the OT all pointing towards Christ and see the similarities between what Christ went through and what the Old Testament figures went through, we realize that Christ is the glue that binds the Old with the New.

4) The Bible as Personal

As Orthodox Christians we are to look everywhere in Scripture for a *personal* application. We are to ask not just, “What does it mean?” but, “What does it mean to *me*?” Scripture is a personal dialogue between the Savior and myself — Christ speaking to me, and me answering.

I am to see all the stories in Scripture as part of my own personal story. Who is Adam? The name Adam means “man,” “human,” and so the Genesis account of Adam’s Fall is also a story about me. I am Adam. It is to me that God says, “Adam, where are you?” (Genesis 3:9). “Where is God?” we often ask. But the real question is what God asks the Adam in each of us: “Where are you?”

When, in the story of Cain and Abel, we read God’s words to Cain, “Where is Abel your brother?” (Genesis 4:9), that also is addressed to each one of us. Who is Cain? It is myself. And God asks the Cain in each of us, “Where is your brother?” The way to God lies through love of other people, and there is no other way. Disowning my brother, I replace the image of God with the mark of Cain, and deny my own essential humanity.

Practical Ways to Read the Bible

1) Regular quiet time for daily reading

Set aside a time every single day to read your Bible. Don’t read it in front of the noisy TV or in a place where there is a lot of distractions. Instead go to your room, and in quietness read from the Living Word. Instead of opening the Bible up randomly, read it systematically, book-by-book so that you can understand it better.

2) Quick prayer before reading to open your mind to the Words

Before you decide to do your daily Bible readings, say a quick prayer to the Lord. It does not have to be a long prayer, it can even be a quick line to say “Open my heart to understand your life-giving words”. This simple short prayer will be accepted by God and He will give you the wisdom and patience to receive His words honestly.

3) Discuss Bible with your friends

There are many things you discuss with your friends – like sport, school, family, games – but why not discuss the Bible with each other? Try to make an effort to include this in your discussions with friends; ask them what book they are up to, what they learnt from the particular story they are reading.

4) Highlight verses you love, write them down in a notebook, memorize them

The Bible is full of beautiful and comforting verses. But some of these verses might strike a cord with you and really help you and comfort you. With the Bible you own at home, why not highlight the verses you love? Write them down in an exercise book and read over them and memorize them. You will find yourself repeating these verses over and over and they will help you when you are most in need.

5) Ask your parents or Sunday school teachers if you have any questions

You will not understand every verse in the Bible, some might be a little difficult for you to understand. If you have any questions, why not ask your parents about it? Or why don't you write it down and ask your Sunday School teacher about it? You might even like to own the "Orthodox Study Bible" which has explanations at the bottom of the page on some of the hardest verses.

Conclusion:

When you jump in a car and travel to a destination that you do not know, you need directions. You would use either a street directory or a navigator to give you directions to where you want to go.

In our lives, we all have the same common destination we are aiming for – heaven. And where do we find the directions to get to Heaven? It's all in the Bible. The Bible is our navigator – and we need to read it daily so that it can lead us to the destination we are all aiming for – Heaven.

?