

The Compass

A tool for disciplers

THE WORD



CONVERSATION ON THE JOURNEY

Helping your disciples develop a love of Scripture is one of the most important things you can do for them. If they fall in love with this book, and begin to read it hungrily, it will change their life. Most Christians can trace their spiritual growth back to the time they began to read their Bible. You can help the people you are working with begin to grow right now.

The Bible is pretty huge and can be rather intimidating. A new Christian may hear a variety of passages quoted from John, or Ephesians, or Genesis, or Daniel. They probably will have no clue who or what those labels refer to. If you will give them the big picture, you will effectively be giving them the hooks upon which they can hang the messages they'll hear. This will go a long way in helping them to understand everything else that they are taught. Open up your Bible with them, show them the table of contents and flip through the Word to explain the information below.

Structure

The Bible divides into two basic sections, the Old Testament and the New Testament. Testament is another word for covenant or promise. Thus, the Bible is a book about God's promise to us. The bulk of the Old Testament primarily covers a period of time from about 2500 BC till about 400 BC. It specifically focuses on God's interactions with the Hebrew people. There are 39 books, or sections written by a number of different authors. The New Testament has 27 books, which were all written between about 40 and 90 AD. They focus on the life, ministry, and ultimate effect of Jesus Christ.

The Old Testament divides into at least three major sections. The first part (Genesis to Esther) contains the history of the Jewish people. It's roughly chronological, and everything else that follows somehow fits back into the times described in those history books. The next section (Job to Song of Solomon) is all poetry. Much, but not all of it was written during the kingdoms of David and Solomon (roughly 1000 BC). The last section (Isaiah through Malachi) contains the writings of the prophets. They wrote about a great deal, but mostly they spoke about two major catastrophes in Israel's history. In 722, Israel was destroyed by Assyria, and then in 586, Babylon attacked and captured Jerusalem. These events were incredibly significant in the life of Israel. By and large, the prophets wrote to warn of, or explain, these events. The final prophet, Malachi, wrote about 400 BC, and then there was silence until Jesus' arrival.

The New Testament also divides into three main sections. The History section contains four biographical accounts of Jesus. They are the Gospels of

THIS WEEK'S EXCURSION

Psalms 138 says that God has exalted His Word above all things. Since He values it so highly, it's imperative that we also exalt it. You have two objectives in this lesson. One, to explain the overall structure of the Bible so that it's not so overwhelming; and two, to motivate them to begin to read the Bible on their own.

We want to hear from you! Please send your feedback on this guide to centerfield@uscm.org

MORE OF THE CONVERSATION

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. There is also Acts, which is a record about the first several decades after Jesus' resurrection. Like in the Old Testament, nearly everything else that follows fits back into the era recorded in the history books. The next section (Romans through Jude), contains epistles, or letters written by early church leaders to various congregations or individuals. They struggled with and celebrated the same things we do today. The final section of the New Testament (Revelation) is also prophecy. It's primarily about Jesus' second coming, and the interval between His two advents.

As you are explaining this, you might highlight a passage from each section that is significant to you. It's not important to teach from each section. You just want to help build some categories in their minds - cubby holes where they can file away all that they are going to learn.

Motivation

Your second objective is to motivate them to begin to read their Bibles. To accomplish that, I'd do two things. First, show them what the Bible says about itself. That it is literally the Word of God. That it's true, reliable, perfect, alive. Listed here are several passages you could share with them to show this: [Joshua 23:14, Psalm 19:7-10, Psalm 119:160, 2 Tim 3:16-17, Hebrews 4:12, 1 Peter 1:23-25, 2 Peter 1:20-21]. Choose from these (or your own list) and help them see the great value of this book.

Second thing I'd do is be enthusiastic. Show them a passage (or two) that has been significant in your life. I love to show people the "nuggets," cool passages that show the consistency of this book, the evidence that it has a divine author. Your love for the Bible will help fan into flame their own.

Final Exam

You might want to finish this one up with a little quiz: what are the major divisions in the Old Testament, name a book found in each, etc.

It may be helpful if you teach some tricks to memorize the order of the books in the New Testament. Here are a couple of such tricks:

Galatians, Ephesians, Phillipians, Colossians start with the same letters as General Electric Power Company.

1,2 Thessalonians, 1,2 Timothy, Titus. All the "T" books are in alphabetical, numerical order.

Hebrews, James, 1,2 Peter, 1,2,3 John start with the same letters as Howard Johnson's: plump and juicy (sorry, you might come up with your own for this one.)

At any rate, mnemonic devices and quizzes are both great aides to learning. Have at it. Teach the children well.

NEXT STEPS

Challenge them to begin to read one chapter of the Bible a day. John's Gospel would be a great place to start. It has 21 chapters, so in three weeks time they could finish it. When they finish, I'd have them read Luke's Gospel. When they are done with that, suggest Acts, and next Romans. But just suggest one book at a time, don't overwhelm them.

SIDE TRAILS

What Christianity is All About. Alan Scholes. Navpress.

Basic Christianity. John Stott. Eerdmans.

Praying God's Word. Beth Moore. Holman.

The Case for Christ. Lee Strobel. Zondervan.

Order at christianbook.com