

Welcome to *The Great Adventure*™



“To fall in love with God is the greatest of all romances; to seek him, the greatest adventure.”
– *St. Augustine of Hippo*

The Bible is at the heart of our Catholic Faith—and our relationship with God. It is the living Word of God, where our Father meets with us and lovingly speaks to us. Reading the Bible should bring us closer to Christ, but understanding it is not always easy. Many people tell us they have tried time and again to prayerfully read Scripture, but they get frustrated because they “just don’t get it.”

The Great Adventure is designed so that anyone can make sense of the Bible and experience the life-changing power of God’s Word. At the core of *The Great Adventure* is the concept that there is a story running through the seventy-three books of the Bible that ties all of Scripture together and makes sense not just of the Bible, but of our lives as well.

That story is God’s plan as it has unfolded throughout salvation history and continues to unfold today. Once we grasp this “big picture,” the readings at Mass begin to make more sense, our Scripture reading and study come to life, and we see how our lives fit into God’s loving plan.

Hundreds of thousands of participants have discovered the riches of Scripture by experiencing one or more *Great Adventure* Bible studies. It is our prayer that you will gain a newfound understanding of God’s Word that will transform your life and bring you closer to Christ.

Jeff Cavins, creator and president, *The Great Adventure*
Sarah Christmyer, co-developer and author, *The Great Adventure*

About *The Great Adventure* Catholic Bible Study Program

At the core of *The Great Adventure* is *The Bible Timeline*™ Learning System: a simple way to get the “big picture” of the Bible by focusing on the story that runs throughout Sacred Scripture. *Great Adventure* Bible studies explore the biblical narrative in light of Catholic teaching and the historical, cultural, and literary context of the Scriptures to discover what Scripture reveals about God’s plan and our place within it. Studies of individual books of the Bible are supplemented by thematic and “life application” studies.

Every *Great Adventure* study is designed to foster:

- Familiarity with the Bible and ease of reading it
- Bible study habits consistent with the guidelines of the Catholic Church
- Personal engagement in the Word of God
- Faith-sharing based on the Word of God
- Growth in knowledge about Scripture and the Catholic Faith

About *Psalms: The School of Prayer*



At the heart of the Bible are the Psalms: prayers from God that help us learn to pray. The Holy Spirit inspired them. Israel sang them. Christ himself prayed them, as did our Blessed Mother. These sacred hymns become our heartfelt response to God's loving and wondrous deeds for us. Their words capture the imagination and draw us into a deeply personal encounter with God. *Psalms: The School of Prayer* will help you establish a deeply personal dialogue with God.

Materials

Materials for *Psalms: The School of Prayer* include:

- **Workbook:** contains session summaries, home reading assignments, engaging study questions, responses to the questions, talk notes for the video presentations, the Psalms Reference Card, as well as helpful maps, charts, and diagrams. (*You will need one workbook for every participant, study leader, and small-group facilitator.*)
- **Video Presentations** (eleven 50-minute sessions): presented by Jeff Cavins, Sarah Christmyer, and Dr. Tim Gray, these eleven talks provide comprehensive teaching and commentary on the Psalms. (*You will need one DVD set.*)

In addition, every participant, leader, and small-group facilitator should have a Catholic Bible and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. For this study, we recommend *The Great Adventure Catholic Bible*, an RSV-2CE Bible that incorporates the same color-coded *Bible Timeline* Learning System that you will use throughout this program.

How the Study Works

Every *Great Adventure* study includes four essential steps, which are designed to fit together and build upon each other. Following these steps in order will help you to get the most out of each session.



STEP ONE: HOME PREPARATION

NOTE: *There is no home preparation required for the first week, Introduction.*

Each session begins with personal study that involves reading Scripture and answering a series of questions that will help you understand and think more deeply about what you have read. Some questions will include additional reading from other parts of the Bible or from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* to help you consider the passage in light of the bigger picture of salvation history and Catholic teaching.

We recommend that you allow at least 90 minutes to complete the reading and answer the questions for each session. We also suggest that home preparation be done in several sittings over the course of a week. This will help you create a habit of daily Bible reading and prayerful meditation.

STEP TWO: SMALL-GROUP DISCUSSION

The small-group discussion is one of the most effective components of a *Great Adventure* Bible study. During this discussion, members of your small group will have an opportunity to share their insights into the Scripture reading. The goal of the small-group discussion is to help participants obtain a richer understanding of the readings and apply them to their lives. Trained facilitators guide the small-group discussion and keep it on track. To learn how to facilitate a small-group discussion, visit ascensionpress.com. Be sure to follow the “Ten Commandments of Small-Group Discussion” on page xi.

STEP THREE: VIDEO PRESENTATION

Jeff Cavins, Sarah Christmyer, and Dr. Tim Gray wrap up each session with a video presentation that offers unique insights and profound connections to help you gain a deeper understanding of the Bible and its relationship to the Catholic Faith, with a special emphasis on ways to apply what you have learned to your life.

STEP FOUR: REVIEW OF RESPONSES

NOTE: *There are no responses for the first week, Introduction.*

The final step—reviewing the responses at the back of this workbook—is done at home prior to beginning the reading for the next session. These responses will help you read the Scripture passages for the next session in the proper context.

For the most effective study experience, complete these steps in the following order: (1) Read and answer the questions; (2) discuss them in your small group; (3) view the video presentation; and (4) review the responses. During the discussion, your small-group facilitator will incorporate points found in the responses, but the richness that comes from individual insights can be lost when participants view the responses prior to the discussion.

For more information about how to plan and promote a Bible study and how to facilitate a small-group discussion, visit ascensionpress.com or call 1-800-376-0520.

Session Outline and Reading Guide

Each session in this workbook has the following sections. (Note: The first week, Introduction, does not have study questions or responses.)

1. Session Questions (used during Step 1: Home Preparation and Step 2: Small-Group Discussion)

- A. Establish (or review) the Context
- B. Read the Story
- C. Take a Deeper Look
- D. Application

2. Session Talk Notes (used during Step 3: Video Presentation)

3. Session Responses (used during Step 4: Review of Responses)

The following chart offers an overview of the home preparation readings assigned in each session of the study. The main reading is provided in section **B. Read the Story** and should be read before you answer the session questions. Additional Bible readings and *Catechism* readings are provided in section **C. Take a Deeper Look** and should be read as you answer the study questions for each session.

Session (Video Time)	Main Reading	Additional Bible Readings	Catechism Readings (CCC)
Introduction	—	—	—
1. Getting the Big Picture	Psalms 1–2, 146–150	Psalms 3:1, 3:8, 7:1, 7:17, 13:1, 13:6, 18:1–3, 18:6, 19:7–11, 41:13, 62, 72:18–19, 89:52, 106:48, 145:21, 146:1, 146:10, 147:1, 147:20, 148:1, 148:14, 149:1, 149:9, 150	2589
2. Seeing and Hearing the Psalms	Psalms 1, 18, 34:1	—	—
3. Learning to Pray with the Psalms	Psalms 1	Psalms 34, 42, 51:10–12, 91, 119:11–16; James 1:22–24	1177
4. The Responsorial Psalms	Psalms 23; Ezekiel 34; Matthew 25	—	—
5. Royal and Messianic Psalms	Psalms 2, 22, 72, 110	Psalms 18:1–2, 27:5, 32:6–7, 36:7, 46:1–7, 57:1–2, 91:1–2, 99:1–5, 118:5–9; Matthew 3:17, 17:5; John 3:17; Acts 4:23–28, 13:33; Hebrews 4:14–16	2606
6. Thirsting for God	Psalms 42, 63	Psalms 1, 19:7–11, 34:9–10, 36:7–9, 37:4; John 7:37–39	—

Session (Video Time)	Main Reading	Additional Bible Readings	Catechism Readings (CCC)
7. Psalms of Pilgrimage and Ascents	Psalms 120–134	Numbers 6:22-27	103–104, 163, 1013, 1392, 1419, 2837
8. Psalms of Suffering and Lament	Psalms 13, 88	Psalms 1, 2, 88	—
9. The Penitential Psalms	Psalms 32, 51, 143	Psalms 6, 38, 102, 130	1502–1505
10. Psalms of Praise and Thanksgiving	Psalms 100, 108, 145–150	2 Chronicles 20:20-23; Psalm 69; Romans 1:18-23; Philippians 4:4-7; James 5:13	1328; 2639

What to Do for Each Session

1. Welcome and Introduction (10 minutes)
2. Small-Group Discussion (40 minutes)
3. **Note to Study Leaders:** There is no small-group discussion for the first week. Instead, use this time to divide participants into small groups of eight to twelve people, ensure that everyone has the study materials, and explain how the study works. Each small group should be led by a trained facilitator.
4. Video Presentation (50 minutes)
5. Closing and Prayer (5 minutes)

Getting the Most out of This Study

This study will help you understand the Bible in a new way. The “head knowledge” you gain will help you grow in “heart knowledge” as you follow up on what you have learned. The Bible will always remain a mystery, though, and that is part of the beauty of it: We can never exhaust the treasures of Scripture. Fortunately for us, the Bible is not a subject to master; it is a place to encounter the living Word of God.

Whenever you open your Bible to read, *start with prayer*, and place yourself in God’s presence. You might take Samuel’s prayer as your own: “Speak, for your servant hears” (1 Samuel 3:10). When you read, adopt an attitude of listening. Try not to treat Scripture as a text, but as a personal message from God. What is he saying? What does it mean? What does it mean for my life? If you come to the Word focused on having an encounter with the Lord, he will speak to your heart, and you will be transformed.

An Important Note About the Responses to the Study Questions

Responses to the study questions are provided in the back of this workbook. These responses do not exhaust the meaning that can be found in the Scripture reading. People will have unique insights. The responses have two important functions:

1. The first purpose of the responses is to provide participants with a review of each session, which will help establish a context for the reading and questions in the following session. The best time to read the responses is just before starting on the next session.
2. The second purpose of the responses is to provide guidelines for the small-group facilitators.
Facilitators: Complete the Scripture reading and answer the questions on your own before reading the responses in preparation for facilitating the small-group discussion.

Participants should not review the responses for each session until after the session is completed. Although it might be tempting to look at these responses in advance, it is important to wait for the following reasons.

1. Bible study is not about simply watching a video presentation or reading a Bible commentary. It is just as important to immerse yourself in the Word of God itself and engage it with your heart and mind. The questions in *The Great Adventure* studies are designed to draw you into the Scriptures so that the Word of God will be planted and grow in your heart. Reading a response written by someone else may satisfy your mind for a moment, but it will not result in the kind of growth that will occur if you attempt to answer the question on your own first.
2. The success of a small group depends on a good discussion. A group of participants who have spent time pondering the Scripture passages on their own will have more varied insights to discuss.

For these reasons, please wait to read the responses until after the session. When you follow the steps of this study as intended, you will explore the Word of God in different ways—in the reading, the small-group discussion, the video presentation, and, finally, in the responses. Follow these steps over time, and you will be more than fed—you will learn to feed yourself.

Ten Commandments of Small-Group Discussion¹

1. Enjoy yourself!
2. Speak with respect and charity.
3. Do not ridicule or dismiss what others say. Keep comments positive.
4. Come prepared.
5. If you were not able to prepare, let others speak first.
6. Stick to the topic and questions at hand.
7. Start and end on time.
8. Allow silence. Give people a chance to think.
9. Listen to others without interrupting.
10. Keep personal matters within the group.

¹ Adapted from Thomas Smith's original "10 Commandments of a Small Group."