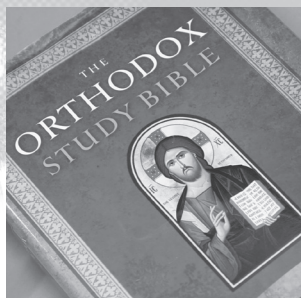


Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. And these words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.

—Deuteronomy 6:4–7 (RSV)



A LAMP TO MY FEET

PARENT GUIDE

Dear Parents,

For many of us, one of life's simple pleasures is curling up with a good book. As Orthodox Christians, we are called to immerse ourselves deeply in Holy Scripture and enjoy the stories and instructions of our Lord. The Bible is the story of God's loving relationship with us, and its pages invite us to an inexhaustible source of wisdom and inspiration. As the passage from Deuteronomy implies, we must first have God's words inscribed upon our hearts in order to effectively teach them to our children.

This guide is offered for you and your family as a companion to *A Lamp to My Feet*. We recommend you read the zine in conjunction with this supplement. *A Lamp to My Feet* zine was created for young people in grades 6–9. If your children are younger, adapt the material to your child's comprehension level. We pray this resource will help you and your children grow closer to God as we come to understand the narrative of our Lord's covenant with us, His people.

With love in Christ,

The Center for Family Care
Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America

READING THE BIBLE AS A FAMILY: WHY IT IS IMPORTANT

Making the Bible an important part of our families' spiritual lives is crucial. The time spent reading together will model an example of healthy family unity and provide the initiative for our children's personal growth as they learn to read the Bible on their own. In making family Bible study a regular practice, our children will learn the importance of Holy Scripture in the daily lives of Orthodox Christians.

Of course, reading the Bible isn't like reading other books—we don't read through it and then stack it on a shelf next to, say, the latest best seller. Rather, our copies of the Bible should occupy special, and accessible, places in our homes. We should strive to make the Bible our constant reading companion so that we are mindful of its teaching throughout our day. We must keep in mind two important things as we begin to read the Bible.

Relationship

First, reading the Bible is less about accumulating rote knowledge than it is about developing a relationship. For example, when we read a textbook for a class, we go through it and take notes to commit certain concepts to memory. When we finish the text, we've acquired a certain amount of knowledge. However, when we read the Bible, we enter into a relationship with the living God. When we engage with the Bible on a regular basis, we learn more about ourselves through this dynamic, healthy, and—above all—loving connection with our Lord. God's Word reveals His relationship with humanity. The more we acquaint ourselves with the Bible, the more we encounter our Lord, simultaneously learning about Him and ourselves.

Comprehension

The next thing we must keep in mind is that God is so great and so loving that we can't possibly ever fully comprehend His essence. Because of this, reading the Bible can seem overwhelming! The Bible has many riches for us, but numerous questions will also arise in its study. Take heart, though, and know that you don't need to be an expert to lead your family in meaningful engagement with the Bible. You will encounter difficult and challenging passages, prompting questions from parents and children alike. "I don't understand this!" "Is this even relevant today?" Know that with consistent effort, these challenging sections will become clearer. The more we familiarize ourselves with the Bible's teachings, the more our lives will be transformed, bearing the fruit of its words.

Do you wish to enjoy the words of your service and to understand the meaning of the words of the Spirit that you utter? Then ... let your mind sink deep into the study of the words of the Spirit, until your soul is roused to heights of understanding and thereby is moved to glorify God ... There is no peace for the mind in merely reading the set prayers; and disturbance of mind deprives it of the taste of the meaning of understanding.

—*St. Isaac the Syrian*



MAKE TIME FOR BIBLE STUDY

Like prayer, the practice of reading the Bible bears fruit through consistency. We should make a firm commitment to engage with God's Word for the benefit of our relationship with Him. Gauge the attention spans of your children and keep your Bible sessions brief, but meaningful. Be realistic in your expectations, keeping in mind the words of St. John Cassian: "Less is more. It is not the amount of learning that must be our aim, but the quality of learning. Better to learn two verses with understanding than a whole page with wandering thoughts."

Integrating the Bible into Your Life

- Establish a daily or weekly time to read the Bible. This could be in the evening as part of after-dinner and bedtime routines, or other times when the entire family is home. Establishing this routine will make it easier for all family members to stick to the commitment and, as a result, it will build a strong foundation of faith for children as they develop.
- Set aside some time on Saturday night to read the gospel lesson for the Divine Liturgy the next day. Use the Family Gospel Lesson (www.familygoarch.org) to guide your family in this endeavor.
- Attend parish-sponsored Bible study sessions and regularly send your children to church school and other youth programs where the Bible is discussed. This will enable family members to learn about the Bible in peer groups and bring home the learning to share.
- Consider investing in a quality audio rendition of the Bible on CD or in MP3 format for listening in the car, at work, etc. Additionally, look into buying biblically themed movies, apps, and other types of media that will engage your children and serve as a good launching point for discussions about Holy Scripture (see the *Continuing to Grow* section at the end for more resources).

WHAT TO READ

The Bible is big! It is actually one big book that is made from several smaller ones. So, where do we start? Several methods might be suggested, but one way is to follow the readings that the Church assigns to each day of the calendar. For much of the year, they consist of two relatively brief portions of the New Testament—one from the gospels and one from the epistles. The daily exercise of reading these passages will help in building your spiritual "muscles." An understanding of the Old Testament is important, as well. As you are able, extend your reading to the Old Testament, as well as the other parts of the New Testament, to broaden your comprehension of the Bible's message. For more information on the contents of the Bible, see pages 10-19 in *A Lamp to My Feet*.

Getting to Know the Bible

- Page through your Bible as a family and get to know its composition and layout. As it becomes familiar, call out certain passages by book, chapter, and verse (such as John 3:16) and allow your children to look them up and read them.
- Get to know how a Bible concordance works. A concordance, found in the back of many Bible versions, is an extensive alphabetical index of key terms such as forgiveness, love, truth, etc. and indicates where they would be found throughout the Bible. A concordance can help direct family conversations on topics by giving relevant scriptural examples. If you don't have a hard copy, try www.biblegateway.com; it is an extensive searchable Bible website.
- Have family members compare and contrast similar stories from the four gospel books. Discuss how each one reveals something different about Jesus Christ's life.

Our purpose is to awaken in the child a consciousness of the presence of God, of His action in our lives, of our relationship with God. Bible stories are a reflection of precisely this reality, the reality of an encounter with God. The stories are inspired, vivid, simple, having a real artistry of language.

—Sophie Koulomzin



START WITH PRAYER

As with any worthy task, we should always begin our reading of the Bible with prayer. This displays a proper approach to God as we ask Him to illumine our minds and hearts in receiving His Word. To begin, stand in front of an icon and light a candle if you like. Take a moment to focus your attention on God. The goal here is not just to say the words but to pray them with deliberate thought.

Take time before beginning to make sure everyone understands the prayer. If need be, simplify the words for very young children. Make copies of the prayers so you can all pray together with one voice. If you have children who cannot read, take one line at a time and have them repeat after you. There are many prayers our Orthodox Church offers us to encourage us in our prayer life. A good resource can be the Online Chapel of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America (www.goarch.org). Additionally, you can offer prayers with your own words. If you are reading the parable of the Good Samaritan, take time to offer prayers for those in need and ask God to guide you in assisting them as the Good Samaritan did. For a prayer to read before studying the Bible, see page 4 in *A Lamp to My Feet*.

READ AND DISCUSS

Once you have decided which biblical passage you will focus on that day, read it aloud and discuss it as a family. It can be nice, when appropriate, for everyone to have his or her own Bible to follow along. Exchanging thoughts on the reading reinforces understanding and helps to apply its teachings to our lives. Consider the following questions to inspire meaningful discussion:

- **What happened in the story or passage?** *(Allow family members to retell the passage in their own words to clarify comprehension. Young children can draw a picture of an event, a character, or the setting.)*
- **What does the story or passage mean in our lives?** *(Allow family members to explain how they could apply the lesson as a Christian.)*
- **What makes living this lesson difficult?** *(Allow family members to share what obstacles they face in trying to live out their Christian faith.)*
- **What did we learn today?** *(At the end of the discussion, have family members summarize the main points and state what they would like to remember from the reading.)*

Keep the discussion brief and try to stay focused on the main points to keep your family's collective attention. Numerous questions are likely to arise during family Bible study. Remember, you are not expected to have all of the answers nor do you need to answer every question that arises! Use unanswered questions as opportunities to learn and grow as a family. Unanswered questions can be set aside and turned to prayer for future insight. Check with your parish priest to seek guidance with challenging subjects.

Practical Strategies for Discussion:

- Utilize the time in the car on the way to and from church to discuss important themes from the epistle and gospel readings while encouraging your children to listen attentively as the readings are given during the Divine Liturgy.
- As children grow in their knowledge of biblical passages and themes, point out that many parts of the Divine Liturgy come directly from Holy Scripture.
- Set up a question box in your house where family members can add questions they have about the Bible and their Orthodox Faith. In this box you can add questions that come up when reading the Bible. Once a week pull a question out and search for the answer through reliable online sources such as www.goarch.org and through communication with your parish priest.

CONTINUING TO GROW:

Family Resources for Studying the Bible

Bibles

Orthodox Study Bible—This Bible contains the complete Old and New Testaments and has commentary and footnotes from noted Orthodox theologians. Published by Thomas Nelson.

New Testament and Psalms Orthodox Youth Edition—This pocket sized Bible is geared specifically for Orthodox Christian youth and young adults. Published by the American Bible Society.

Children's Bible Reader—This Bible storybook for children has many detailed watercolor illustrations done in a style reminiscent of the Orthodox Byzantine icons. Published by American Bible Society.

Books

Bread for Life: Reading the Bible by Theodore Stylianopoulos, published by GOA Department of Religious Education.

Growing Faithful Families by Rebecca Myerly, published by Light and Life Publishing.

The Year of Grace of the Lord by A Monk of the Eastern Church, published by St. Vladimir's Seminary Press.

The Orthodox New Testament Volumes I & II, published by Holy Apostles Convent.

The Explanation of the Gospels Volume I–IV, published by Chrysostom Press.

Web Sites

Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America (www.goarch.org)—Daily Bible readings, prayers, saints of the day, and much more.

Family Gospel Lessons (www.family.goarch.org)—Sunday Gospel lessons with background information, discussion questions, activities, prayers, and inspirational quote.

ExeGenius (<http://exegeenius.goarch.org>)—A collection of the Sunday Gospel readings, annotated with helpful Orthodox quotes and explanations.

Children's Bible Reader Online (<http://cbr.goarch.org>)—Online bible reading, games, puzzles, coloring and other activities for children.

Antiochian Gospel Program (<http://www.antiochian.org/christianeducation/letusatattend>)—Features age-appropriate gospel text and audio for each Sunday and major feasts in the Orthodox Church.

Bible Gateway (www.biblegateway.com)—An easy to use resource that includes various Bible translations and concordance search features.

Movies, Apps, and Other Media

Daily Readings—An app from the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America to keep the daily scripture readings, saints of the day, and prayers at your fingertips.

Ancient Faith Radio—Embraces the Orthodox Christian faith, encourages discipleship, equips the faithful, and evangelizes the world through online audio and video programming (www.ancientfaith.com).

Orthodox Christian Network—Shares the timeless faith of Orthodoxy with the contemporary world by using modern media: radio, the Internet, podcasts, DVDs, television, and more (www.myocn.net).

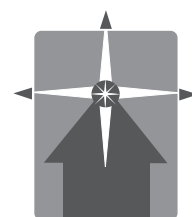
Nest Family Bible Story—Produces animated Bible stories for children from both the Old and New Testament.

VeggieTales—Adapted and animated Bible stories for children with music and fun characters who are all vegetables.

Chronicles of Narnia—This movie series as well as the books make for a wonderful study of the Bible for teenagers and young adults. Also available through Radio Theater on CD or as a download.

Bible for Kids—This iPhone/iPad app allows kids to explore stories of the Bible through interactive adventures and beautiful illustrations.

The Center for Family Care of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America strives to help *grow faithful families in Christ*. For resources for families and parishes, visit www.family.goarch.org.



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