

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the CEB Student Bible. This is probably not the first Bible you've ever read, or tried to read. Or maybe it is. Either way, we want you to know that this Bible is a bit different, and it might help to read this introduction before you dive in.

THIS BIBLE IS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE, BUT IT IS NOT A GUIDEBOOK TO GET YOU SAFELY THROUGH ADOLESCENCE.

Sometimes people think of the Bible as a self-help book or advice column—the place you go to find answers to the questions that come up in your life. But if you've ever actually gone to the Bible to find direct, simple answers to the questions that you really care about, you've probably come back with more questions than you started with. And this can be frustrating, or even discouraging. There is a reason why online quizzes and numbered lists of tips (“Are you an introvert or an extrovert?” “7 signs you are dating the wrong person” “10 habits of successful people”) are so popular—they give us simple answers. But the Bible is not about simple answers. The more you read it, the more you notice the contradictions, the paradoxes, the things that don't make sense for your life today, the things that raise serious questions about how you're living your life today. And rather than getting frustrated by it, we invite you to think of it as a good thing. Because LIFE isn't simple, and FAITH isn't simple. Maybe you were lucky enough to have an uncomplicated life to this point, but as you get older, it won't be as straightforward. And it can be a relief to know that the core book of your faith is just as complex as the world is, as your life is, as being a faithful Christian is. Think about it: Christianity claims that Jesus was fully human and fully divine; that God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are part of a Trinity that is actually one; that Jesus really did die and really was resurrected; that you have to humble yourself to be great. These are paradoxes that take a lifetime to understand. The Bible is like that, too—it takes a lifetime to understand. Consider it a companion on your journey of understanding yourself, the world, and God.

What makes this Bible different is that these questions and complexities are lifted up, rather than ignored or made into easy answers. As you read, you'll notice textboxes throughout. Some are written by scholars—pastors, seminary professors, and students who have devoted a lot of time over the years to wrestling with the difficulties of the Bible. They've highlighted certain passages, provided a bit more information about the context for these passages, and asked some questions that these passages raise. Other textboxes are written by young people—people who aren't experts but are just faithful people like you who are willing to dig into the Bible and ask God what it all means. Consider all of these writers to be dialogue partners—companions who are walking alongside you, wrestling with the same complex texts you are.

THIS BIBLE IS FOR STUDENTS, BUT IT IS NOT A TEXTBOOK. A lot of people think of the Bible as a book of facts to memorize, like a history or science textbook. But this is actually a pretty recent way of thinking about the Bible. Throughout the history of Christianity, faithful people have more often thought of the Bible as the story of God and God's people—a story that you, as one of God's people, are invited to become a part of so that you can come to understand who you are, where you and your people came from, and where you and your people are going. This is a story with many voices; some tell narratives about important people and places of the past, some sing out for joy, some cry in pain or shout in anger, and some describe visions more shocking than any action movie you've seen. These voices can be confusing, and different readers can come up with different interpretations of what it all means—just like the best stories. And though you do not need to memorize passages or facts to pass a test, you'll find that some passages are so beautiful, so meaningful, so powerful in helping you explain the world, your experience of God, and your place in God's story that you'll want to return to them again and again, like your favorite songs or movies or books. In fact, you may even want to draw or sculpt them, act them out, write your own songs about them, or just discuss them with friends.

What makes this Bible different is that we've included a section at the end of each book that asks the big questions to get you thinking about the larger themes of the book. This section also suggests some creative ways of engaging the text using art, prayer, and current culture. Consider these suggestions to be ways of loving God with all your heart, being, mind, and strength (Mark 12:30) by engaging the Bible with your emotions, spirit, intellect, and physical senses. These are ways that faithful people have tried to enter into and understand the story of God and God's people for centuries.

THIS BIBLE IS FOR STUDENTS, BUT IT ASSUMES THAT THE BEST STUDENTS ARE ALSO TEACHERS. Ever wanted to lead a Bible study? Preach a sermon? Discuss your faith with your friends in ways that go beyond what you learned in Vacation Bible School? This Bible is designed for you, your youth group, and your church to study the Bible for yourselves. The questions and activities suggested along the way can be done on your own, or you can do them with a group to teach yourselves and each other in challenging and creative Bible study. However, you will need a few basic instructions to lead some of the activities.

LECTIO DIVINA

At the end of each book, we've listed some passages to use with the practice of *lectio divina*. This is a Latin phrase that means "divine reading." It's an ancient practice of meditating on the Bible that encourages us to let go of our own expectations and assumptions about what the text "means" and instead open ourselves up to listening to what God wants to say to us through the text. You can do this by yourself or as a group, but it works best if you treat it like prayer—find a quiet place away from distractions, maybe light a candle, and find a comfortable seated position that's restful but won't make you fall asleep. Allow lots of silence between the moments of reading and speaking if you are in a group. If you're by yourself, consider writing down your thoughts in a journal.

FIRST READING: Read to yourself or have someone else slowly read the biblical passage aloud one time. Pause, and then read it a second time. Then consider the questions “What stood out to me? What word or phrase ‘sparkled’ or ‘shimmered?’” Just notice what images or phrases bubble up for you. Don’t judge or analyze; just notice.

SECOND READING: Read the passage again, followed by more silence. Then consider the questions “Why did that word or phrase stand out to me? What’s going on in my life that I am touched by it?”

THIRD READING: Read the passage one more time, followed by more silence. Then consider the question “What is God trying to show me through this word or phrase?” Listen for an invitation in the passage: to do, be, or become something in response to what you have read.

Finally, simply rest in God’s presence, and close in prayer.

BIBLIODRAMA

The more you explore the Bible, the more you will notice that there are many stories about people and events that skip a lot of details or explanation and that are dramatic, confusing, or even shocking. The ancient Jewish tradition of *midrash* involves closely examining the written texts for meanings that might not be obvious at first because you have to read between the lines or try to put yourself in the story to understand it. Bibliodrama is a fun kind of *midrash* in which you can act out scenes from the Bible, adding your own details and giving characters in the story a chance to say more about what they think is going on.

Take a look at 2 Kings 2:23-25; you know, the story about two bears mangling forty-two youths because they mocked the prophet Elisha. In addition to being a great story to act out, there are a lot of unanswered questions raised by that scene that might make more sense if you walk through it and imagine what it was like to be Elisha, to be the youths, and to be the bears. This Bible suggests several scenes where acting it out might deepen your understanding of what happened and of what God was doing in that moment. Choose one of these passages, and get members of your youth group to take on the roles of all the characters in the scene—the people present, the people who are not in the scene but who are behind the scenes (such as family members, friends, bosses, or servants), the animals, and even the trees, roads, or other objects that are important to the story, even if they don’t normally “speak.” Ask questions of the characters to find out what it was like for them to be in the scene, try out different ways of acting out the scene, and ask how the story could be understood from different perspectives. Then ask, “Where is God in this? Where do we hear God speaking to us through this story?”

USING ART AND CULTURE

The Bible includes memorable images, dramatic stories, beautiful poetry, and emotional songs of joy and pain. The Bible contains art, and it has inspired art throughout the centuries. Sometimes our understanding of scripture can be deepened when we look at how people

have expressed their own understanding of scripture artistically, and when we try to communicate our experience of scripture through our own artistic creativity. We can also come to better relate to the ancient art of the Bible when we see how there are current art forms that do similar things but that are more familiar to us. This Bible suggests some ways to use your creativity, the art of others, and specific contemporary forms of art and culture to deepen your connection with the text.

READING IN WEIRD PLACES

Sometimes we need to be taken out of familiar surroundings in order to see something new. There are some passages in the Bible you probably know really well because you hear them read in church or quoted in youth group a lot. But when things get too familiar, we stop listening for something new that God might be telling us. So this Bible suggests some ways to read the Bible in weird or unfamiliar places—in nature, public areas, other buildings besides a church—in order to shake things up a bit. Hopefully new insights into where God is in the world will shine through in the midst of these weird places.

THIS BIBLE IS AN INVITATION, AND WE HOPE YOU ACCEPT IT. The many people who worked on this project believe young people are not just leaders for the future but prophets for the present, with unique insights and perspectives that adults need to hear. We want you to deepen your understanding of scripture because *you* can teach *us* and help us ALL love God and neighbor more deeply. We invite you to take up this book to join the ancient story of God's people and help others follow in your footsteps.

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