

A-E-I-O-U: A simple five-step Bible study for Sunday's readings

The ABCs for a DIY Bible study

by Fr. Dave Mercer

Beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them what referred to him in all the scriptures. [Luke 24:27]

At Saint Patrick Church, in Carlsbad, California, Sean leads a men's Bible study that prepares for Sunday by studying the scheduled readings. I like how Sean puts it: "Studying the Sunday readings through the Old Testament, early Church Fathers, and the Church's 2,000-year history, I began to realize that Christians 2,000 years ago dealt with the same problems and uncertainties we have today. Group Bible study has deepened both my understanding of Scripture and my relationship with Jesus."

Catholic publishers today offer excellent packages of videos and workbooks. And yet, for Catholics who gather with a few friends for a [Bible study group](#), here's one simple way to prepare together for Sunday Mass by reflecting on the Sunday Scripture readings.

Our Protestant friends promote a variety of Bible study methods that, with a few simple additions, work well in a Catholic setting. One, called "A-E-I-O-U," can be easily adapted for the Sunday readings. All you need are the readings for Sunday, paper to write on (perhaps a homemade worksheet), a kitchen table (or a room at the parish), a prayerful heart, and some cookies.

The ABCs of a DIY Bible study are there in AEIOU: Ask → Emphasize → In your own words → Other passages → Use it.

Catholic Touches. Key is to read the Scriptures within the Church community, and you'll do that by reflecting on the Sunday Scriptures, adding a resource from Catholic scholars and teachers, and using the responsorial Psalm as your prayer.

Sunday Readings. Studying all three readings (and the responsorial Psalm) can overwhelm a group. During Ordinary Time, the Gospel readings follow a sequential pattern taking us with Jesus and the disciples to Jerusalem and the Cross, preceded by an Old Testament reading that anticipates the Gospel. This reflects our ancient Christian understanding of the New and Old Testaments illuminating each other. The famous bishop-saint, Augustine of Hippo, put it this way: "The New Testament lies hidden in the Old, and the Old Testament is unveiled in the New."

Following the KISS principle — Keep it simple — I recommend setting aside the second reading. Then, the responsorial Psalm can make for the prayerful framing of your time together.

Once a group begins with prayer and a simple icebreaker, read the Gospel passage and continue with each of those five steps. Let's look them one at a time:

Ask questions, perhaps following the investigative questions of a journalist:

- Who is Jesus speaking to?
- What is his message?
- Why might his message be important for the people?
- When, where, and why is this happening?
- How is he communicating his message?

Seek to understand by entering into the story from the perspective of someone who is there. Doing so makes the passage not simply about a long ago event, but present to you now.

Emphasize key words and phrases. Underline or highlight words that repeat, grab your attention, or capture the core message — gel highlighters and pens are helpful. Do this when the passage is first read, questions are discussed, or during a quiet moment that follows. What resonates with you?

In your own words. Write down what’s happening in the passage and what it means. Summarizing helps you to connect more deeply with its message.

An important Catholic addition: read a Catholic commentary or reflection about the passage. You have wrestled with the passage and expressed it in your own words, now it’s time for the insights of a scholar putting the passage in his or her own words. Consider two commentaries and a reflection for consideration:

- *New Collegeville Bible Commentary*: easily read by ordinary Catholic.
- *Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture*: written and formatted for ordinary Catholics.
- *First Impressions*: Dominican priest and homiletics teacher [Jude Siciliano](#) weekly reflection on the Sunday readings, typically focus on the Gospel and available by Monday morning at his [website](#) or [by email](#).

Other related passages. A second Catholic adaptation of AEIOU makes the first reading for that Sunday your “other passage.” Prayerfully read the first reading, noting what resonates. Then explore its relationship to the Gospel, which differs by season:

Sundays in Ordinary Time: how does the Old Testament passage anticipate the Gospel passage, or, how does the New fulfill the Old? Discuss how you see that connection. And yes, sometimes the connection won’t be obvious.

Sundays in Advent: how does the Old Testament reading speak of Israel’s hope for salvation and a Messiah? Discuss how Jesus fulfills the Old Testament hope.

Sundays in Lent: how does the Old Testament reading prepare us to understand Jesus’ Passion, Death, and Resurrection?

Sundays in the Easter season. The first readings are from the New Testament’s Acts of the Apostles. Discuss the Resurrection’s effect on the life and mission of the Church.

Use it in application to your life. Now allow what you've read and discussed to transform how you live. Ask: "What decisions or relationships does today's session call me to consider? What part of my life can be transformed by God's grace if I only trust the Lord more?" Write down your answers, and share them if you wish.

Ending prayer. This Catholic adaptation of the AEIOU Bible study tool (method) focuses on the Sunday Gospel and the first reading. However, the responsorial Psalm for a given Sunday is intended as a reflection on the first reading. With that in mind, you can pray the Psalm as your own prayer, with everyone praying the words together or taking turns with each verse.

For Sean, studying Scripture with others has deepened his understanding of Scripture and his relationship with Jesus. Can there be a greater preparation for Sunday?

Were not our hearts burning [within us] while he spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us? [Luke 24:32]