

How to start a home Bible study group

A simple do-it-yourself approach can make it happen

by Fr. Dave Mercer

“In the sacred books, the Father who is in heaven comes lovingly to meet his children, and talks with them.” [Catechism of the Catholic Church, 104]

When Mickey Salem of Santa Teresa Parish in San José became Catholic, he admitted to others after Sunday Mass: “I wish I understood this better.” He soon realized that others — both new and lifelong Catholics — felt the same way. When he suggested he might start a Bible study about the Mass, they too were interested. Together, they explored the Biblical roots of the Mass and also formed some new friendships. Mickey continues to lead Bible studies at his parish.

Mickey Salem found a way to make a Bible study happen with his friends, and so can you. Here are five simple steps for making it your next DIY project, following the KISS principle: Keep it simple.

1. Line up the essentials

Let your parish staff know about your Bible study plans. Ask if someone can be your contact when you have a question you can’t answer, if others might be interested in a Bible study group, and help you find a room. You can invite friends, fellow choir members, or people you sit near for Sunday Mass. Inquire about including your invitation in the bulletin or newsletter. Decide if you can host the Bible study around your living room table or need a room at the parish.

Give yourself permission not to be a Bible scholar. Your role is simpler and KISS compliant: to give others a place to pray together, to hear God’s voice in Sacred Scripture, and to know Jesus more deeply. The thought of leading a group might seem intimidating, so I’ll suggest where you can find some guidance at the end of this article.

2. Decide what you’ll study

A common first-time topic is one of the Gospels or a topic, such as the Mass, but I suggest a different start that aligns with KISS. In doing so, your Bible study group will be able to test the waters and consider a direction.

I recommend the popular and free YouTube channel of Catholic Scripture scholar, Fr. Tim Peters. He covers many books in the Bible, as well as for the Sunday readings, with videos typically at 20-30 minutes. For your first Bible study session, I recommend his [17-minute video](#) for *Paul’s letter to Philemon*. The letter is very short, needs only one video, and offers a great ice-breaker topic: friendship.

If you’re comfortable with a DIY approach, you can write your own discussion questions beforehand. Or, consider using an AI assistant, such as, ChatGPT or Google Gemini. You can

ask: “For our Catholic Bible study on *Paul’s Letter to Philemon*, give me 6–8 open-ended questions that encourage group discussion rather than yes-or-no answers. Also, end with a question about applying the passage to our lives, and suggest a two-sentence introduction or question that can help participants listen to the passage.” Choose the best five.

3. Follow a simple meeting format

Decide how often you’ll meet and for how long each session will be — 90 minutes is usually fine. After a few gatherings, they can take turns bringing snacks and leading prayers.

Your first meeting will likely run shorter, but that aligns with the KISS method. It can run as follows:

1. Prayer, then a simple ice-breaker question, such as, what interests you about studying the Bible?
2. Read Paul’s Letter to Philemon.
3. Watch Fr. Tim Peters’ video, followed by quiet reflection with the five-question handout.
4. Discussion with the five questions.
5. Pray for the grace needed to apply the letter’s message to one’s life.
6. Enjoy some cookies.

That’s very doable. You can follow that basic outline with other videos by Fr. Tim Peters and Scripture passages. As the friendships deepen, the group can decide what’s next.

4. Create a welcoming conversation

Let’s apply the KISS method to group discussions — again, keep it simple. Two short videos can help.

Ascension Press has a ten-minute video, [Facilitating a Small Group Discussion](#), that includes tips for handling difficult situations that you can write down and refer to during a discussion. [Practices of a Small Group Leader](#) walks you through how a small group discussion can be spiritually transformative — not a Catholic production, but, at six minutes, one of the best introductions I found.

5. Let the group grow naturally

Be willing to start small, and trust that showing up matters. Once a week, send them a simple reminder of the next gathering, and, as they grow spiritually, they might invite friends to join. As you gain confidence as the leader, others will pick up on that and ask about your group.

If you begin with three people, that’s fine. Jesus understood that good things often start small, saying that “where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” [Matthew 18:20]

And may your next DIY project bear fruit from hearing God’s message for you.