

## **WELCOME!**

Welcome to *Discovering the Bible: A New Generation*. As you begin this course of study you will be joining thousands of others throughout the world who make up the learning community of the Kerygma Program. It is a community where serious intent, personal preparation and active involvement provide the basis for significant learning.

*Discovering the Bible* is a basic comprehensive introduction to the Bible as a whole. The phrase “the Bible as a whole” is used to convey a concern for more than learning about each book and its contents. It seeks to underscore an interest in seeing the inter-connections among the many parts of the entire Bible, as it speaks to us of God and faith and people. Through a process of reading, reflection, discussion and creative expression you will discover people, events and places and encounter a variety of biblical ideas. While the focus of the course is to provide an introduction to the Bible as a whole, our hope and expectation is that you will move beyond learning details about people, events and places to new understandings and experiences of faith and life.

Throughout your study there are two important factors you will want to keep in mind.

1. Personal preparation is essential to the success of your learning experience. While the time spent with your study group will offer a variety of learning experiences, the course is based upon the readings from the Bible that are to be completed before the group meets. During the group meeting you will be sharing the discoveries and questions that arise from your readings.
2. Any introduction to the Bible has built-in frustrations. One of the major frustrations is related to the limitations of time. Some readings will raise more questions than answers. Other readings may trigger ideas that invite further exploration. Occasionally there may not be enough time to raise all of your questions or to explore some of your ideas. So be patient with yourself, the study resources, your leader and others in the group. Hopefully this course of study will be followed by additional study opportunities where questions and ideas introduced here can be explored in greater depth. The section “Learning Resources” provides further information about the books referred to in this study and suggests possibilities for further discovery.

# DISCOVERING THE BIBLE: A NEW GENERATION

## — What? Why? How?

The two primary resources for this course are the Bible and this Resource Book.

### The Bible

The major resource for *Discovering the Bible* is the Bible. In thirty sessions, you will read many of the key passages in the Bible: verses and chapters, poems and stories, histories and prophecies. Since the Bible unfolds the story of the people of God in a particular order, we will follow that order most of the time.

A study Bible with cross-references, footnotes, annotations, and so on, is recommended. A number of good study Bibles are available, such as the *New Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha (NRSV)*, the *New English Bible with Apocrypha (Oxford Study Edition)*, and the *New Jerusalem Bible* (hardbound with notes). Although it is not a study Bible, many people have found *Today's English Version (Good News Bible)*, published by the American Bible Society, to be a very readable translation.

The translation used in the text of the Resource Book is the NRSV — the *New Revised Standard Version* (except where noted), but you are encouraged to compare it with other contemporary translations. However, the use of a paraphrase is not appropriate in a study such as this, where the objective is to come as close to the original text as possible. Since a paraphrase often includes the understanding the translator has of the text, individual theological viewpoints and commentary creep in.

### The Resource Book

This Resource Book is your guide for reading the Bible. You will use it to help you discover the biblical story and reflect upon its meaning. The biblical story unfolds in thirty sessions — fifteen Old Testament and fifteen New Testament discoveries. It is essential that you read the material in the Resource Book and complete the suggested activities prior to each session.

The group sessions will build upon the work that has been done in the Resource Book. It will be difficult to be a part of these sessions without having done the individual study, because the group sessions do not rely upon a lecture. Instead they depend upon the participants sharing their summaries of the Bible passages as well as the other skill-building activities. The group's leader will be guided by the Leader's

Guide, which provides opportunities to share together the discoveries being made. The Resource Book and Bible contain everything necessary to prepare you for active participation in the group sessions.

Each discovery session follows the same format:

- 1. The Story Continues.** This section continues the narrative from where it left off in the previous session and summarizes the scope of the biblical story disclosed in the Bible passages for this session. The section begins with a biblical quotation. Most of these quotations are questions, linking us to our ancestors who also sought to know more and who asked questions to discover God's will for their lives. The story also continues in the use of a symbol illustrating each of the discoveries. On the two title pages for the Old Testament and New Testament the symbols come together and often lead into each other. The story unfolds counter-clockwise starting with the symbol on the upper left. The symbol which begins and concludes our discoveries is not part of the continuing story.
- 2. Preparing for the Search.** This is a very important part of your preparation. In this section are the names of people, events, and places you need to know about as you read the passages of Scripture listed for the discovery. Also listed are terms and concepts that will help clarify what you read. At the bottom of the first full pages of each discovery you will find a "timeline." It indicates when the central events in the biblical story occurred. The early dates are approximate and are based on a comparison of several different sources.
- 3. The Search Begins.** Discovery is a search, a process of gathering and then putting pieces together. The Scripture readings are the most important part of the discovery process. The passages selected to be read in this course are primary texts for understanding the Bible. As you read you are to make notes that will help you summarize the biblical story or the passages. In order to keep the preparation time as uniform as possible for each of the discoveries, care has been taken to balance the number of verses read for each session. The Old Testament sessions, because of the greater number of books, average 180 verses each session; the New Testament sessions average 135 verses. Even so, you will find it difficult to read only the required passages. You may want to read some of the verses that precede

and follow these passages. Since there are various ways to tell a story, some selections reflect a choice between parallel readings.

4. **The Search Continues.** The format of this course encourages questions and discoveries; it is an approach intended to engage you and others in the group in a living dialogue with the people of the Bible. Ancient questions are still pondered today. Ancient discoveries provide answers to our search for God. If we read the Bible expecting to hear God speaking to us, we will discover the voice of the Almighty. Yet, because these ancient writings reflect a world far different from our own, there are many questions that arise from our reading. In other words, both exclamation points and question marks will be key parts of our reading and study of the Bible.
5. **Focusing the Search.** In addition to providing an introductory survey of the Bible, this course introduces or reviews basic Bible study skills. In this section you learn about the use of study tools such as a Bible concordance, Bible dictionary, Bible atlas, Bible handbook, Bible commentary, cross-reference notes, footnotes, etc. You will find these skills useful every time you read the Bible.
6. **Putting It Together.** During the discovery process there come “aha!” moments, times when the pieces come together. Those moments may happen to you during your reading of the Bible, in the process of discovering and questioning, in the experience of “Focusing the Search,” or in the activities suggested in this section. These learning activities are broad in scope, taking in the big picture of the biblical story.
7. **Reflection.** After “aha!” comes “So what?” What difference does this discovery make in your life? In what way has God’s ancient word become God’s current word to you? The purpose for reading the Bible is to discover not only how God has acted and spoken in the past but also to hear what God says to us today. We read the Bible with the assurance that God will make the ancient word spoken to our ancestors a contemporary word spoken to us. Two reflection topics and various questions are provided in this section to guide your personal reflection, meditation, and prayer.