

# Using a Concordance

## Purpose of Method

Learning to use a concordance is an essential skill for exploring the Scriptures. Once learned, this skill can be used throughout one's life.

A concordance is an alphabetical listing of words found in the Bible with a reference to the passage in which the word is found. (Concordances are also available for large bodies of secular works, such as Shakespeare's plays.) Many of the students may be familiar with a phrase they think may have come from the Scriptures but do not have the knowledge base to be sure. When the students use a concordance, they become active participants in their learning, which builds ownership and promotes retention. In their search the students often come upon other passages that are related to their original search, which is another wonderful way to extend their learning, knowledge base, and faith.

## When to Use a Concordance

A concordance may be used for a variety of purposes in the classroom, all of which engage the students in using the Scriptures for themselves.

- *Thematic purposes:* In the classroom, for example, you can ask the students to use a concordance to do a Scripture search on a particular topic, such as parables. This can be a way to launch a new unit, support a topic within a unit, or close a unit.
- *References to particular teachings:* The students often understand that the Church has a particular teaching, but they may not necessarily know the scriptural roots of the teaching. The students can be invited to use the concordance to search the Scriptures for possible references on a particular teaching.
- *Deeping their own faith:* Students who can find Scripture references that aid their own faith often make deeper connections to God. You can ask the students to find a passage on a particular topic that has meaning to them and then have them develop a short prayer service around that topic; or maybe they can choose a meaningful Scripture passage to serve as meditation during prayer.

Using a concordance is a lifelong skill that has endless uses.

## How to Use a Concordance

Young people, as well as any who lack experience with the Scriptures, may need some general instructions in how to use a concordance the first time. However, after they have had a few experiences with it, using a concordance becomes natural.

First, a concordance is an alphabetical list of words. Each word is followed by a list of references to passages where that word can be found throughout the Bible. The list gives passages in order, from the first book in the Old Testament to the last book in the New Testament. The list is laid out in an abbreviated form: first the name of the book, then the chapter, and finally the verse(s) along with a phrase from the passage that contains the specific word. In some concordances the passage is given in



phrase form, and the first letter of the word abbreviates the word itself. For example, one reference to the word *love* in such a concordance would look like this: 1 Cor 13:13: *So faith, hope, I remain, these.*

If a student is unfamiliar with the Bible, you may need to explain that the references are laid out in their abbreviated form and discuss what those abbreviations mean. The contents page of the Bible may also assist students if they do not know the book abbreviations. Next, you will need to teach the skill of “scanning” the references. For example, if looking for a Scripture passage on “love,” one would find more than a hundred passages in a concordance. Scanning through the passages will offer a general idea of the passage’s content. However, the only way to fully know the Scripture and content of the passage is to go to the Scriptures themselves and look it up.

Many Bibles contain their own concordance in a reference section. Using this resource within one’s own Bible can be easiest for young people or those inexperienced with the Scriptures. However, some concordances have been published separately, not as part of a Bible. In this case, it would be helpful to explain to the students that there are different translations of the Bible: for example, the New American Bible, New Revised Standard Version, and so on. If the concordance being used is referencing one specific translation of the Bible, while a different translation is being used to look up passages, the wording can be slightly different, and it may be difficult to locate some passages. For this reason, it is recommended that the students use a concordance that is found in their own Bible.

