

Teach Your Teen How to Read Their Bible

One of the most important tools you can give your teenage children is to teach them how to read and study their Bible. Here are some steps for you and your kids to learn to do this together.

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Parents contact me frequently to ask what devotionals or young adult Bible studies I would recommend they do with their teens. As our kids enter the teen years, our responsibility as their parents is to help them develop good habits of interacting with the Bible. Finding an approach that is age-appropriate and manageable is key. My encouragement is to simply read

the Bible with your teen in a way that models and trains Bible literacy—no special teen resource required.

Your teen will be exposed to devotional content and topical studies at every turn, and they likely don't need a resource that is targeted specifically at their demographic. What most are missing are basic tools to help them read and learn the Bible on their own. By guiding them in some basic study methods, you can position them to use devotional and topical material with far better discernment and far greater benefit, as those types of resources assume a first-hand knowledge of the Bible that many teens have not yet developed. Here is a simple approach that you can adapt to fit the age of your teen:

1. Choose a book of the Bible to read and discuss together. If you have never studied together, start with a shorter book like James or Jonah. If at all possible, tackle longer books like Genesis or Hebrews while you still have the opportunity to guide and shape their study method. The goal is to give your teen exposure to the value of studying an entire book from start to finish, as opposed to only studying topically or devotionally. If your church is doing a sermon series through an entire book of the Bible, you could align your discussions with the preaching schedule to add another layer to what you are learning.

2. Get a copy of your selected book of the Bible that has room for taking notes. You can create one by copying one chapter at a time from [Bible Gateway](#) into a document. Set the margins to wide and the spacing to 1.5 so you have room to write. Or, you can purchase these really great [ESV Scripture Journals](#) if you want something that is ready-made, usable and attractive. Get a copy for you and for your child.

3. Set a schedule to meet once a week for a 30-minute discussion. Use a reading plan to help you break the text into readable increments. Most reading plans are set up for daily reading through the entire Bible in a specific period of time. Simply adapt the daily portions into weekly ones for the book of your choosing. For example, this [ESV reading plan](#) covers the book of James in eight days, but you could cover it in eight weeks using the same text divisions. Create a schedule for your discussion times that notes dates and passages to be discussed. A schedule for James might look like this:

Week	Discuss:
1	Intro questions
2	James 1
3	James 2:1-13
4	James 2:14-26
5	James 3:1-12
6	James 3:13-18
7	James 4:1-10
8	James 4:11-5:12
9	James 5:13-20

4. Get a bird's-eye view. For your first discussion time, ask your teen to come with answers to the following questions about the book you have chosen:

- Who wrote the book?
- To whom was it written?
- When was it written?
- In what literary style was it written?
- What are the central themes of the book?

A good study Bible can provide these answers, or an online resource like Bible Gateway. I also highly recommend the Bible Project's "Explore" series that gives overviews to books of the Bible. Here is the page for the book of James, to give you a feel for how and what they communicate.

As you read together through the book you have chosen, help your teen think about how the answers to these questions shape their understanding of the book's message.

5. Prepare for discussion. Each week before you meet to discuss the text, both you and your teen prepare by doing the following:

- Read the week's passage from start to finish.
- In the margin of the copy of the text:
 - Write (or make a drawing of) the main idea of the passage.
 - Write a 1–2 sentence summary of what you read.
 - Find one attribute of God that the passage is teaching. (Here is a list of attributes that can help your teen practice reading the Bible with a Godward focus.)

- Write two things you observe in the margin.
- Write two questions you have about what you have read.

6. Meet to discuss. Go over what each of you has noted in your copy of the text during your personal study time. Compare your answers, observations and questions. Look for answers to your questions in an accessible commentary or study Bible. You could also track down answers after you meet together and discuss them the following week.

Then, explore the following questions together:

- How does this passage fit into the book as a whole? How does it flow from the previous section of the text?
- How does this passage minister to its original audience?
- How does it minister to us today?
 - Is there a sin to confess?
 - Is there cause for thanksgiving or praise to God?
 - Is there a promise or truth to trust in?
 - Is there an attitude to change or a motive to examine?
 - Is there a command to obey or an example to imitate?
 - Is there an error to confront or avoid? (Note that you have a rich opportunity to practice and model vulnerability with your teen in these questions.)

7. Pray together. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you apply what you have learned.

The teen years are pivotal discipleship years for our kids. These are years in which they feel a restlessness to enter fully into mature adulthood but often an accompanying lack of clarity about how to do so. Give them adult-

sized tools for navigating their Bibles, and help them learn how to use them. Encourage them to use devotional and topical materials as supplements to, but not substitutes for, direct study of the Bible itself. Model good habits of Bible reading. And most of all, savor the shared learning that results when a parent and a teen sit down to open the Word together.