



Study ^{THE}
BIBLE
WITH A
TEEN



Significant OTHERS

Every year across Australia at summer camps, week of prayer programs, local churches, rallies and camp-meetings, hundreds of kids give their hearts to Jesus. Many of them specifically ask for Bible studies and have a desire to prepare for baptism. Some of them do it year after year...

It is **IMPERATIVE** that we follow through the first time they ask. The window of opportunity does not remain open for long. We must engage our kids while they are on fire for the Lord, otherwise they may begin to believe that we don't care about them. Nothing would be more tragic than to lose these young ones from God's kingdom!

Now is the time to act.

This is your opportunity to make a real difference in the life of the kids in your church or community. Society is declining. Traditional family units are becoming a rarity, and many organisations that in times past have cared for the well being and nurture of our youth are closing up shop and walking away because it's all too hard. More and more kids are in desperate need of "significant others" in their lives—caring adults prepared to put time and effort into them. You have significance and influence. Use these gifts for Jesus.

"Jesus did not remain in heaven, away from the sorrowing and sinful; He came down to this world, that He might become acquainted with the weakness, the suffering and the temptations of the fallen race. He reached us where we were, that He might lift us up. In our work for the youth, we must meet them where they are, if we would help them..."
(Ellen White, Gospel Workers, page 209)

So please take the time to read through this little booklet—carefully and prayerfully, and with a heart and mind open to the prompting of the Holy Spirit. You could be the one who makes a real difference in the life of a child, and there is no greater reward than that...

"When all that generation had had been gathered to their fathers, another generation arose after them who did not know the Lord nor the work which he had done for Israel" (Judges 2:10).

In this crazy post-post postmodern world we live in, it is no longer "a given" that our children will follow in our faith footsteps. The reality is that many—even the majority—do not. If we are to win our children to the Lord, we must work hard to make it happen. We must all be responsible for their welfare and for raising them up in the teaching of the Lord. We cannot leave it to someone else to do. Ellen White put it this way: "The youth need more than a casual notice, more than an occasional word of encouragement. They need painstaking, prayerful careful labour. He only whose heart is filled with love and sympathy will be able to reach those youth . . . We should enter into the feelings of the youth, sympathising with them in their joys and sorrows, their conflicts and victories . . . Let us remember the claim of God upon us to make the path to heaven bright and attractive" (*Gospel Workers*, page 208, 209, 212)

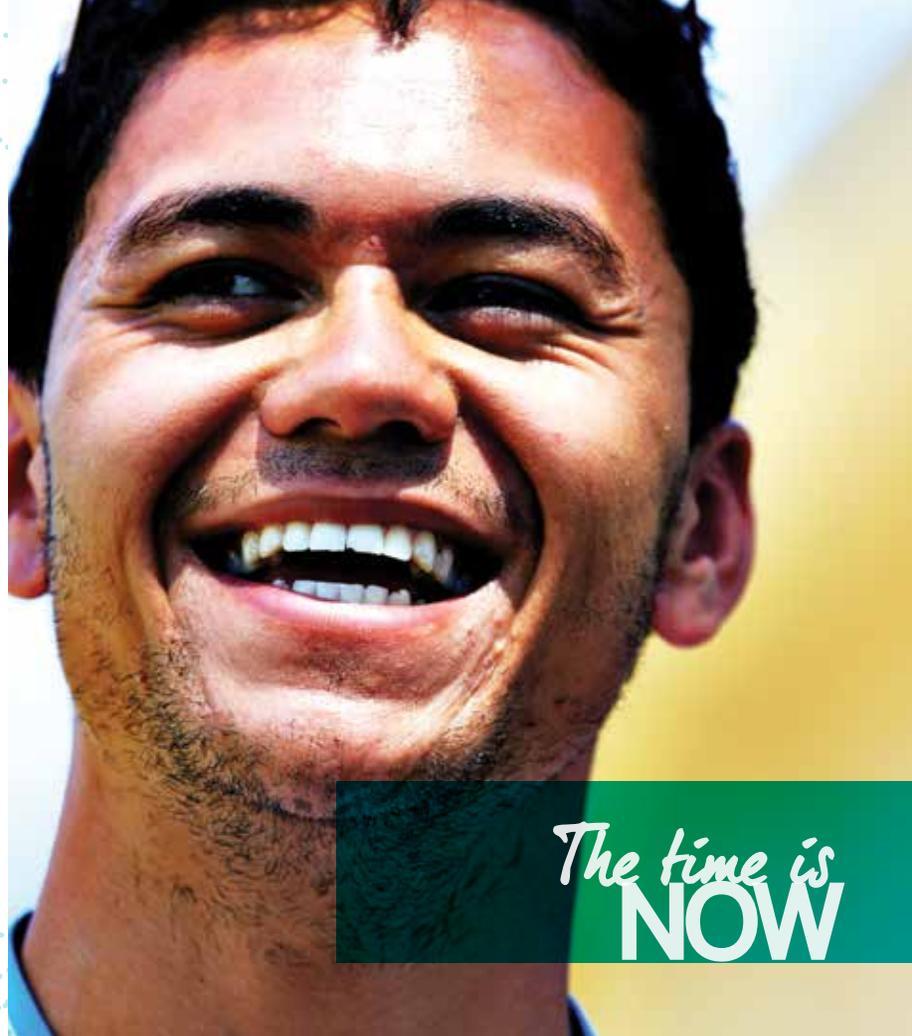
"The youth need more than a casual notice, more than an occasional word of encouragement. They need painstaking, prayerful, careful labour."

Studying the Bible with a teen is an intensely personal thing and it doesn't happen outside the context of a relationship. For a teenager, relationships are everything and their friends are considered the most important people

in their lives. If they are going to allow you to enter this special inner circle of their life, they will want to know they can trust you, that you care for and are genuinely interested in them. You are going to have to become part of their lives.

To lead a teen on this journey is to be linked with them in a special way—forever. They will always look to you as the person who led them to Jesus, and that never changes.

"Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest." (John 4:35)



The time is
NOW



Making CONNECTIONS

So how do we make connections and build up a rapport with the teens in our area? Try these six easy steps:

1. Learn their names. These kids must not remain faces only. We must know WHO they are and this begins by learning and using their name. Don't be surprised if many teens seem amazed that you even know who they are.

2. Affirm them. We all prefer to be around people who make us feel good about ourselves. Giving kids genuine positive feedback demonstrates that you notice what they do and approve. This will be a new experience for many teens who experience more than their fair share of hurt and disappointment.

3. Give them your time. We live in a time-poor era. Parents and teachers, pastors and youth leaders are often so busy being busy that they rarely stop and give real, focused, undivided attention to a teen. Try it. Stop what you are doing, sit down, and simply be there for a kid and see what happens. To offer a teen your time tells them that they matter to you. Respect and value their time and—in time—they will do the same for you.

"To offer a teen your time tells them that they matter to you."

4. Look at them. While there are certainly some sub-cultures that have a "no look to talk rule" it is generally good practice to make eye contact as a way of letting kids know you are "with them."

5. Listen more than (or at least as much as) you talk. Teens need to know that their ideas and opinions matter. By filtering through all the sub-cultural jargon and modes of expression and really listening to what a teen is saying, you will discover there is plenty to learn as well as teach.

6. Ask them for help. Asking for help with a problem, task or church-related program, shifts the power-differential from you to them. By placing yourself in a position of need, you have empowered the other person. This does wonders in helping a teen to realise that they are both valuable and capable of making a real contribution.



Please understand that you will have to work just as hard to win these individuals to God's family as you would a name from any other mission program. If you haven't cultivated or don't have a relationship with this teen already, it is doubtful they will respond positively to your invitation. But if they already know you and trust you, if you are already a part of their life, the likelihood of them saying yes and joining the class will be much greater.

With regard to class style, most kids will prefer a group setting because it grants a certain level of anonymity and takes some individual pressure off them. But there are some kids who will still prefer the individual approach. Whichever style you eventually settle on, it should be negotiated with the teens and their guardians, and all studies conducted in a "kidsafe" manner, observing appropriate codes of conduct for adults working with children (please visit <http://safeplaceservices.org.au/safeguarding-churches> for information on how to be "kidsafe").



Safe Place Services

As mentioned earlier, hundreds of juniors, teens and youth make decisions for Jesus every year, mostly at large church, conference or youth events. What typically happens is that following a Pathfinder series of meetings at a special commitment service, young people are invited to choose Jesus. These invitations are specifically designed to be non-coercive and based on a genuine, heartfelt desire for the young person to follow-through on a discipleship journey with Jesus. The questions asked often look like these:

- Would you like to accept Jesus as your personal Saviour and make Him Lord of your life?
- Would you like to join a Bible-study group or have individual Bible studies as a way of knowing God better?
- Would you like to prepare for baptism and follow in Jesus' footsteps?
- Would you like a visit from a pastor or youth leader to talk about these things?

These names are then passed on to local churches for follow-up. Perhaps to you.



Following
THROUGH

Leonard Sweet calls today's teens an "EPIC" generation and uses the acronym EPIC to describe how this generation best processes information:

E—Experiential: Lectures become much more effective if they are accompanied by experiences that reinforce the spiritual points you're making. They want to SEE or DO, not just HEAR. Edgar Dale's famous "Cone of Experience" demonstrates that people learn and retain better when teaching shifts from words to pictures, symbols and experiences (Google: Edgar Dale).

P—Participatory: Teens want to have a voice and to express themselves. They also want to hear other people's ideas expressed as a way of measuring their thoughts against those of people they like and trust. Learning actually takes place through this dialogue.

I—Image-rich: This generation is visually oriented. They watch 35 movies for every book they read! The power of an image sticks in people's minds better and longer. Try engaging teens with Biblical "scenes" from the life of Jesus as Ellen White recommends (*Counsels to Parents, Teachers and Students*, page 448).

C—Connected: Teens are constantly connected to technology and to each other. They don't want to do things alone. Technology can be used not only to teach biblical values but also a spiritual maturity and resilience that sees through the pitfalls of the prevailing culture. Using Twitter and Facebook gives you another opportunity to engage teens in their world.

Tips for Working With Kids

- You be the leader—they have plenty of buddies. What they lack are significant adults prepared to put time and care into them. Be that person.
- Challenge them. We all learn best when we are taken out of our comfort zones. Stretch without snapping. Bend without breaking.
- Let them work with their friends—do individual ministry in a group context.
- Let them have fun—"Fun" is not a dirty word. A positive learning environment is crucial.
- Respect them. Children are made in the image of God and are precious in His sight. They deserve respect.
- Be flexible. Nothing will ever go 100% according to plan. Expect the unexpected. Plan to adjust your plan.



Epic
IDEAS

Teaching TECHNIQUES

So you've taken up the challenge, and in three days time you're going to be sitting down with a bunch of teens for your first Bible study. What do you actually do and how do you do it? Here are some insightful, tried and tested tips on how to run your group and the type of environment you need to create for kids to benefit the most from your time together. In the book *A Teachable Moment*¹ the authors suggest a variety of practical techniques for use in a group learning setting:

- 1. Creating a safe and positive learning environment.** Kids will be very hesitant to share ideas and opinions in any environment where they feel exposed or unsafe. Work with your kids and together create some rules or behavioural norms regarding comments and judgments during sessions.
- 2. Allow for some superficial answers/comments during reflection activities.** When kids start to consider and reflect they might start with surface-level comments and observations. This is normal, so persevere! As groups develop confidence in the safe space you create, the depth of their sharing and reflection will also increase.
- 3. Silences are OK, even necessary.** Allow time for group members to think and formulate their ideas. Avoid the temptation to jump in with the "right answer" or even "your answer." Be comfortable with the silence—it's not a reflection on your ability (or inability) as leader to "keep the discussion going."
- 4. Be flexible.** Be prepared for the group to take the discussion places you never intended. Go with the flow—you might learn something new, too! Often the journey is as important as the destination.
- 5. Mix up the methods.** Variety, novelty, and the use of different learning tools and methods assists learning. Try using discussion starters such as voting, ranking, the use of continuums, either/or decision makers, moral dilemmas, or "Which would be better? Which would be worse?" activities. Get the kids moving around the room, crossing from one side to the other, standing up, sitting down, voting with their hands, feet or seats. Turn thought into movement and activity. This generates discussion and, ultimately, ideological change.

6. Thoughtful questioning. Try to use "open-ended" questions (ones requiring something other than an yes or no answer). Summarise or restate what has been said or, even better, have another group member restate the discussion.

7. Processing can happen at any time. Sometimes pivotal teachable moments happen quite unexpectedly in the middle of a study or activity. Don't ignore these moments for the sake of the plan. Immediate "in the moment" feedback and reflection can be extremely valuable.

8. Empower participants. Try introducing activities or reflection questions that don't directly involve you, but are dealt with in pairs or smaller groups. This has the advantage of allowing the use of different learning or processing styles than your own particular favourites.

9. Take a risk. Experiment. Allow for the chance that an activity might flop but whatever happens, leave time for processing. Be patient, allow for closure. Make sure everyone has been able to say all they needed to say.

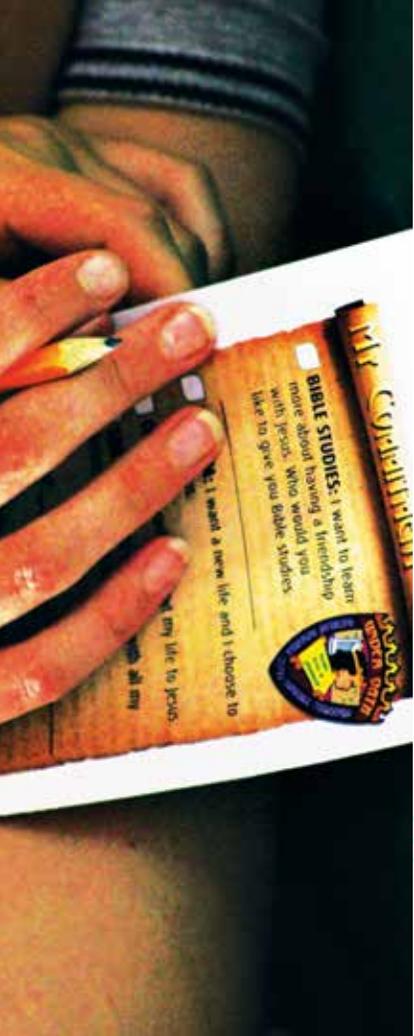
10. Process yourself. Keep a journal of all your sessions, studies and activities, as well as your own learning. What worked? What didn't? How would you do it differently, or better?

¹*A Teachable Moment* by Cain, Cummings and Stanchfield (ISBN 978-0-7575-1782-2), page 22-23.

Teen Learning Preferences

- **Structure:** Teens may not like structure, but they need it. Do the preparation, set careful boundaries, be consistent, run to time.
- **Technology:** Teens have a love/hate relationship with technology. Use it where you can, but don't be controlled or driven by it.
- **Entertainment:** Bible studies can and should be engaging, but also thought-provoking and life altering. No excuses for dull Bible studies.
- **Narrative:** The power of the story is paramount—yours, other's, great heroes of the faith. Kids come alive as they encounter great lives and deeds.
- **Experiential activities:** Provide a compass, not a map. Go on the journey with them and help them discover the truth along the way.
- **Teamwork:** The sharing of challenging experiences frequently has the spin-off of developing a high group loyalty and a sense of team.

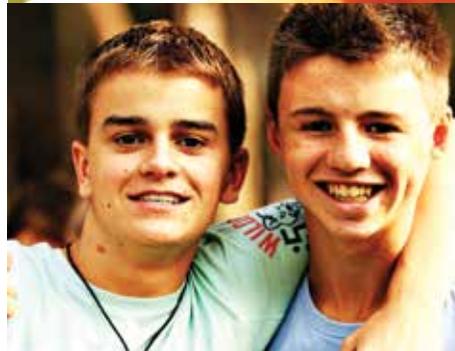
*"Provide a compass, not a map.
Go on a journey with them."*



Teens I will follow through with:

"Attention, Israel . . .
Love God, your God, with your whole
heart: love him with all that's in you,
love him with all you've got!"

"Write these commandments that I've
given you today on your hearts. Get
them inside of you and then get them
inside your children. Talk about them
wherever you are, sitting at home
or walking in the street; talk about
them from the time you get up in the
morning to when you fall into bed at
night. Tie them on your hands and
foreheads as a reminder; inscribe
them on the doorposts of your
homes and on your city gates"
(Deuteronomy 6:4-9, MSG).





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