

**THROUGH THE BIBLE  
IN 12 WEEKS**

12 LESSONS TO HELP STUDENTS  
NAVIGATE THE BIG PICTURE

BY JENNY BAKER FOR URBAN SAINTS



# Through the Bible In 12 Weeks

The Big Picture Experience

By Jenny Baker

**Group**

# Group resources actually work!

This Group resource incorporates our R.E.A.L. approach to ministry. It reinforces a growing friendship with Jesus, encourages long-term learning, and results in life transformation, because it's



## **Relational**

Learner-to-learner interaction enhances learning and builds Christian friendships.

## **Experiential**

What learners experience through discussion and action sticks with them up to 9 times longer than what they simply hear or read.

## **Applicable**

The aim of Christian education is to equip learners to be both hearers and doers of God's Word.

## **Learner-based**

Learners understand and retain more when the learning process takes into consideration how they learn best.

## **Through the Bible**

12 Lessons to Help Students Navigate the Big Picture

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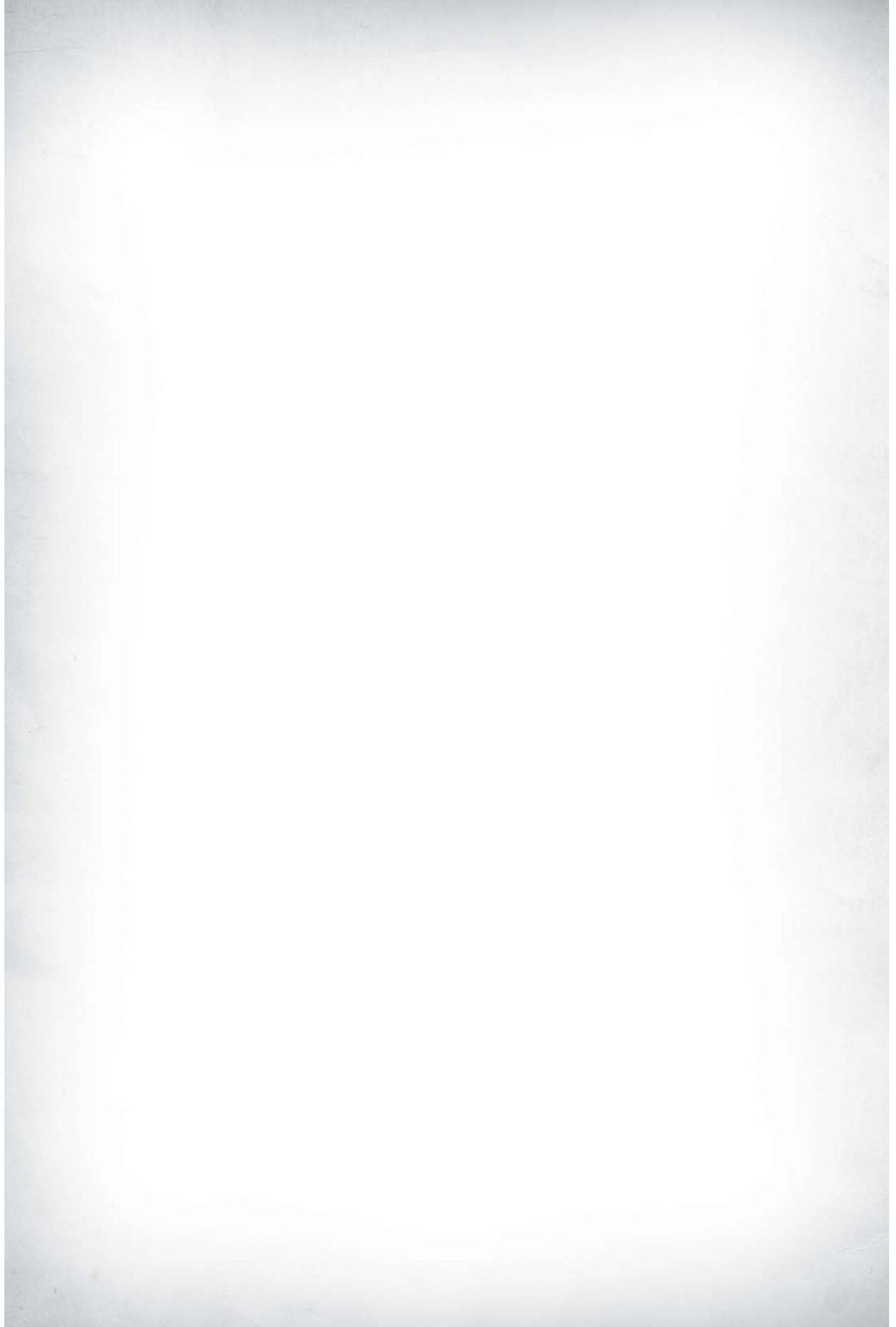
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# Introduction: How to Use These Studies

This 12-week study series will give your teenagers an overview of the “big story” of the Bible. They’ll develop an understanding that this strange assortment of ancient books is all interlinked, purposeful, intentional, and part of an ongoing adventure! These studies will help them understand God’s interactions with people throughout the history of the world, beginning from Creation to the present day and into the future. They’ll help young people locate themselves within this big story as they come to understand God’s plans and purposes in their lives and respond to God’s invitation to be part of his kingdom. Through these experiences with you, your teenagers will gain a deep understanding that they are part of this story and its continuation—that their roots go back to Creation and their future can be in the new creation! And they’ll move beyond just learning about the Bible—they’ll have opportunities to personally encounter the author of the big story: God.

## The Studies

### Engage

Ultimately, it starts with you. Before you teach your group about each theme, idea, or passage, you need to take some time to explore it on your own—to have your own personal encounter with the God of the Bible. So at the start of each session, you’ll find Engage, a short devotion written just for you to help you engage with the biblical story and reflect on how God is leading and challenging you. I hope that communicating this amazing story will impact you, too—that you’ll get caught up in the big picture and have a fresh vision for your place in the ongoing story of God’s interactions with humanity. So be sure each week to spend time with God, listening to what he has to say to you from his story.

### Life-Changing Learning

What was the last new thing you learned and how did you learn it? There’s an old and well-known saying attributed to Confucius, that goes, “I hear and I forget; I see and I remember; I do and I understand.” Is that true in your experience?

Often when we’re communicating Christian truth, we use lots of words and expect our audience to just listen to them and take them all in. And while there’s a time and a place for lectures, sermons, and motivational speeches, youth group meetings are

not usually it! When teenagers come to your youth group, it's not for a school-like experience. They want to have fun, be engaged and involved, express their opinions, and discover new things.

So each week during this study series, you'll lead teenagers through experiential learning activities—games, object lessons, discussions with partners, hands-on projects, private meditation, and other activities that will invite the teenagers in your group to explore, think, interact, and feel. Many of the activities and discussion questions are intentionally open-ended. Not everyone will draw the same conclusions—and that's OK! Don't feel like you have to explain absolutely everything or get your teenagers to rationalize what they have experienced. Sometimes we all need time to mull over our experiences, to live with the mystery and the questions until we reach our own conclusions—that *eureka* moment when we see things far more clearly for ourselves! So leave things open-ended and allow room for God to work...your teenagers may even surprise you with their observations and insights.

## **Group Size**

You can use these studies at home with a small group of six teenagers, in the church gym with 100 teenagers, or anything in between! The activities are created to be flexible for different group sizes. And when special modifications are needed, look for a Tip box in the margin that will give you specific ideas for how to change the experience to fit the size of your group.

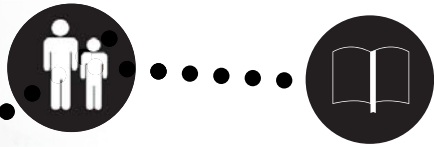
## **Experiencing the Story**

Every study begins with an opportunity for teenagers to do something unique and fun called Experience the Story. Though these parts of the study don't overtly connect to Scripture and don't involve Bible teaching, they do set the stage for what the teenagers in your group are about to learn. These experiences are what will draw your teenagers in and get them ready to think, chew on, and engage with God's Word in a truly meaningful way.

## **Telling the Story**

Each study includes a Tell the Story element in which you'll connect the biblical narrative to the activities the group has just done. These sections involve discussion as well as some teaching from you. Take time to learn what you need

to communicate; in the studies you'll find descriptions of the key points you need to cover as well as samples of how you may want to say things. But don't use our suggestions as a script! Digest the main ideas we've included, and then teach using your own words.



In each of these sessions, one or more teenagers will read Scripture aloud, and this icon will clue you in. Do your best to have plenty of Bibles on hand so that every teenager is able to flip through a Bible and read along. The goal here is to get teenagers comfortable with looking into Scripture on their own—rather than just listening to others read it. If you've got a fair amount of young people who are not familiar with the Bible, be ready to point out page numbers of specific passages, or mark passages ahead of time with sticky notes.

### **Connecting the Story**

In studies 2-11, you'll include a short Connect the Story element that helps teenagers visualize the main point of the story for that day. You'll do this by using a large white poster board each week to create a "page" that's part of the "big story." This section not only covers the theme, but it also gives you a chance to introduce your group to all the books of the Bible and to familiarize them with each biblical genre. You'll keep each poster that's created and will use it in the final session (12) to help your group recap the whole scope of the big story together.

### **Respond to the Story**

Every session also includes projects, discussions, and other experiences that allow for teenagers to Respond to the Story by reflecting on the theme of the study and considering how it applies directly to their own lives.

You'll equip teenagers to take this even further by giving them a weekly Take-Home Devotion (see pages 154-159). These take-home devos will help teenagers spend some time on their own during the week, looking more deeply into the topic and taking a step that puts their ideas into action. As part of these devotions, teenagers will be encouraged to write their thoughts in journals and do some other simple activities. If you can, purchase spiral notebooks, and pass them out at the end of



Study 1; or encourage your group members to use their own notebooks or blank books as journals during the series. Every week, as you pass out the devotion, prompt each teenager to take the page home and tape or glue it into a journal.

## **Meditate and Memorize**

Every study outline begins and ends with a Key Passage of Scripture that encapsulates the study's core message. You can use the Key Passage as a memory verse for your group or incorporate it into your study time in other creative ways; you'll find ideas at the end of each study session for ways you can tie in the Key Passage.

## **Supplies**

Near the start of each study, you'll find a list of the specific supplies you need to use and what copies you need to make from the photocopiable sheets in the Appendix (pp. 153-187); but just so you can plan ahead, here's a big-picture look at what you'll need:

### **General Supplies for Use in Each Study**

- Bibles
- paper and pens or pencils
- iPod or CD player for background music

## Study 1

- 5 to 10 pads of sticky notes (or more)
- 1 large piece of white poster board
- several rolls of tape
- paper bag or bowl
- photocopies of “How Does It End?” (p. 160), “Characters” (p. 163), and “Story” (p. 154), prepared according to study instructions

## Study 2

- small garbage can
- modeling dough or clay (alternate supplies: several sheets of paper, crayons)
- 1 or more plastic trays or place mats
- plastic building blocks and some model instructions (alternate supplies: square-cut paper, origami instructions)
- optional: TV, DVD player, nature DVD (such as the Discovery Channel/BBC series “Planet Earth” or a National Geographic video)
- optional: butcher paper or white poster board, colored markers
- optional: cushions
- 1 large piece of white poster board
- 1 envelope
- photocopies of “Relationship Cross” (p. 169), “Who Made...” quiz (pp. 166-167), “Who Made...” quiz answers (p. 168), and “Source” (p. 154), prepared according to study instructions

## Study 3

- several sets of earplugs
- several blindfolds
- card-stock Relationship Cross used in Study 2 (also on p. 169)
- 1 large piece of white poster board
- 1 black marker
- variety of paper and art supplies, such as pieces of card stock, acrylic or tempera paint, watercolor paint, paintbrushes, magazines, scissors, glue, colored pencils, crayons, construction paper, scraps of fabric, magazines, craft sticks
- newspaper or plastic tarp
- photocopies of “Top Critics” (p. 170) and “Broken” (p. 155), prepared according to study instructions

## Study 4

- adult volunteer
- several large pop-culture posters (movie and band, for example)
- large paper or plastic bag
- several rolls of various kinds of tape (duct, transparent, masking)
- delicious cake or brownies (homemade if possible)
- plates, napkins, and silverware (or plastic ware)
- dirtied bowl and cooking supplies
- dish soap, sponges, dish towels
- sink for washing dishes
- 1 large piece of white poster board
- 3 large sheets of newsprint or flip-chart paper
- red, yellow, and green sticky dots
- tape (to affix the newsprint sheets to the wall)
- photocopies of “The Ten Commandments” (p. 171) and “Invitation” (p. 155), prepared according to study instructions

## Study 5

- clock
- exercise supplies and silly challenge supplies (as needed); see study instructions.
- tempting items, like ice-cold soda, candy bars, other treats, cell phone, pillow, comfy chair, on so on
- paper bag or bowl
- large sheets of newsprint or butcher paper
- tape
- colored markers (not black)
- 1 big black marker
- 1 large piece of white poster board
- photocopies of "The Kings (and Queens) of the Bible" (p. 172), "Idols Today" (p. 174), and "Choice" (p. 156), prepared according to study instructions

## Study 6

- 5 different colored pieces of poster board or card stock
- tape
- 1 large piece of white poster board
- glue
- photocopies of "Shades of Emotions" (p. 175), "I Need Advice" (p. 176), "Write Your Own Psalm" (p. 178), and "Reality" (p. 156), prepared according to study instructions

## Study 7

- 4 different types of snacks
- 3 adult volunteers
- plastic bags, paper plates, and napkins
- your cell phone and an adult volunteer with another cell phone
- large sheets of card stock or card board, cut into speech-bubble shapes
- old magazines, scissors, glue, markers
- 1 large piece of white poster board
- photocopies of "Communication" (p. 157), prepared according to study instructions

## Study 8

- markers, tape, scissors
- makeup, hair straightener and/or curling iron, hairspray, dress-up clothes, accessories
- old magazines, scissors, glue, a large sheet of butcher paper or card stock, pens, markers
- 1 large piece of white poster board
- sunflower seeds (in shells)
- bowl
- white glue
- marker
- photocopies of the "Model Station Instructions" (p. 181), "Character Cards" (p. 183), "Model Template" (p. 182), and "Challenge" (p. 157), prepared according to study instructions

## Study 9

- Relationship Cross (p. 169) from Study 3
- 5 to 15 helium balloons
- heavy card stock, cut into lengthwise strips
- several staplers
- pens
- scissors
- 1 large black garbage bag
- 1 large piece of white poster board
- photocopies of "Failure?" (p. 185) and "Solution" (p. 158), prepared according to study instructions

## Study 10

- several pads of sticky notes
- crayons
- tape
- random objects from your meeting room or brought from home
- 7 sheets of newsprint or flip-chart paper
- 2-foot leather cord for every student
- 7 beads (that fit on cord) for every student
- some extra beads and cord
- 1 large piece of white poster board
- photocopies of "Prayer Cord" (p. 187) and "Life" (p. 158), prepared according to study instructions

## Study 11

- The Day After Tomorrow DVD or similar film (see suggestions on p. 139)
- TV and DVD player
- student art pieces saved from Study 3
- newspapers and magazines
- materials for junk modeling: cardboard boxes, duct tape, masking tape, aluminum foil, scissors, glue, twine, metal clothes hangers, other random pieces of junk
- basic art supplies, like markers, tempera paints, glitter-glue pens, construction paper
- 1 large piece of white poster board
- photocopies of “Hope” (p. 159), prepared according to study instructions

## Study 12

- all 11 “pages” of the story—the poster-board pieces you created during each Connect the Story segment
- optional: tape
- lots of celebratory food and drinks, like pizza, soda, ice cream
- samples of other Bible study materials teenagers could use in the future
- optional: new Bibles to give to teenagers as a way to mark their journey through God’s Word

## Plan Ahead

Be sure to plan ahead for these activities:

- If you can, purchase a blank book or spiral-bound notebook for every teenager in your group to use as a journal during this study series.
- In Study 4, teenagers will try to reassemble torn up posters. Take a shopping trip ahead of time to get totally cheesy teenage (or preteen) posters as well as some cool pop-culture posters. These posters will be destroyed in the study, so buy inexpensive ones.
- In Study 5, you’ll need to borrow some exercise equipment. Call a few families from your church ahead of time to see if they can lend fitness equipment to your group.
- In Study 7, you’ll need a bunch of pop-culture magazines (news, sports, entertainment magazines, and so on). Contact 5 to 10 adults in church at the start of the series, and ask them to save magazines over the next few weeks that they can donate to the youth group. The more magazines you get, the better.
- In Study 8, some teenagers will give a volunteer a makeover, so have a few teenagers bring their beauty supplies, like curling irons, makeup, and so forth.

- In Study 11, teenagers will create models and sculptures using “junk” (like cardboard boxes). Check with the parents of some of your teenagers early on in the study series, and ask if they can save some junk for your group to use. If a few families save some materials for you over a few weeks, you should get plenty of junk for the activity!
- In Study 12, we recommend that you give a new Bible to each student. Check with your church leaders to see if the funds are available to make this purchase.



# 1

# STORY

## Aims

This study will help teenagers

- discover that there is a coherent metanarrative—a big story—running through the Bible.
- understand that God has been involved with people and creation throughout history.
- realize that we are part of the “final act of the play”—the story continues beyond the Bible text to our lives.

## Key Passage

*“All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work.”*

*- 2 Timothy 3:16-17*

# Overview

Experience the Story	25 minutes	In teams of four, teenagers are given the start of a story and the characters in it. They then have to create an ending to the story and act it out.
Tell the Story	20 minutes	In pairs and as a large group, teenagers will creatively explore various opinions about the Bible. You'll introduce the idea of the big story of the Bible and explain what this study is about.
Respond to the Story	15 minutes	Group members will get to know some of the main "characters" in the Bible and will consider their own roles in God's big story. They'll write down their questions and opinions about the Bible during a time of reflection.

# Supplies

Make sure you've got

- Bibles
- photocopies of the "How Does It End?" handout (p. 160), 1 per student
- 5 to 10 pads of sticky notes (or more)
- pens or pencils
- 1 large piece of white poster board with the word "Story" written in large letters in the middle. (Keep this poster for the final study.)
- tape (to affix "Story" poster to the wall during the study)
- photocopies of "Characters" handout (p. 163), cut apart. You'll need approximately 1 copy for every 5 teenagers.
- several rolls of tape
- paper bag or bowl
- iPod or CD player for ambient background music
- photocopies of "Story" take-home handout (p. 154), cut apart, 1 per student

## Before the Study

Prepare photocopies of “How Does It End?” (p. 160), “Characters” (p. 163), and “Story” (p. 154). Put all the cut-apart strips from “Characters” in a bag or bowl. Take some time to personally engage with the theme of this study by using the Scripture reflection suggestions below.

## Engage

*Before the study, set aside some time and space for you to reflect on and engage with the story on a personal level.*

Read 2 Timothy 3:14-17. Think about your experience of the Bible—how you were taught about it, how you’ve read it, what it means to you. Now take a piece of paper and on one side list all the blessings that the Bible has brought to your life and your other positive associations with it. For example, you may think of specific passages that have shaped your life, or people who have taught it to you well, or people who have provided a positive example for you of what it looks like to really read and study Scripture.

Then on the other side of the paper list any negative experiences or associations you’ve had regarding the Bible. For example, you may think of passages that you’ve struggled with, Scriptures that have been misinterpreted or taught to you incorrectly, or feelings of guilt you’ve experienced for not reading it enough.

Now read 2 Timothy 3:14-17 again. Bring both the positive and negative aspects of your experience of the Bible to God in prayer. Be honest with how you feel about the Bible. Ask God to open up his Word to you so that it will equip you for your part in the kingdom of God.

*Pray for your group:*

Thank God for the power of his Word, and pray that the teenagers you work with will get excited about God’s Word.

# THE STUDY

## Experience the Story

(about 25 minutes)

Welcome teenagers as they arrive; then help them form teams of four. Hand out copies of “How Does It End?”, one per person. Invite volunteers to read the character descriptions aloud, and explain that in each team of four, teenagers will each select and play one of these characters. Let everybody know that they can change the gender of the characters as needed to fit their group. (If you’ve got some teams of three, they can drop one of the characters; if there are teams of five, have teenagers make up their own new character and add him or her to the story.) Explain that there are four acts of the play already written; it will be their job to work in their teams to come up with the ending of the story: the fifth act. Stress that as they develop their final act, they need to stay true to the characters as they’ve been described and how they’ve behaved in the first four acts of the story. Characters can change and develop in the story, but they need to have a reason to do so.

Prompt teams to find a space to sit together away from the rest of the group. Have team members read aloud the descriptions of the first four acts of the play, and then give teams 10 to 15 minutes to work out and practice their endings to the play.

The four acts of the story that teenagers will explore together broadly follow the structure of the biblical story. In Act 1, the friends create something good they’re excited about. There’s a parallel here with the world God created. In Act 2, it seems like everything has gone wrong—echoing the Fall. In Act 3, they try to sort things out for themselves, but it just doesn’t work. This is a bit like Israel trying to keep the commandments and live in God’s ways. Act 4 portrays a teacher offering a way to sort things out—a little like Jesus’ intervention in and redemption of the world. The teens themselves have to complete Act 5, rather like the task before us to live faithfully in God’s world. Teenagers probably won’t recognize the similarity to the biblical narrative and that’s OK—these themes will be reinforced throughout the studies over the next several weeks.

After 10 to 15 minutes, invite the teams to present their endings to the rest of the group. After all the presentations, compliment them on their imagination and creativity. Discuss these questions together:

- In your opinion, which endings were most realistic or least realistic? Why?
- How challenging was it to come up with a fitting ending? Explain.
- Did you think it was difficult to stay true to your character? Why or why not?



If you're doing this study with a large number of teenagers, have the small groups pair up to show each other their fifth acts rather than having each team of four present their ending to the entire group.

## Tell the Story

(about 20 minutes)

Say something like: *You just acted out the ending of a story. You read the first four acts, got inside the skin of your characters, and made up an ending. But it wasn't just any old ending. Your characters couldn't suddenly become superheroes, or win the lottery on a Thursday, or escape in their private jet to the Caribbean. This had to be real, to suit the people and the place. It had to make sense. It had to fit.*

*All of us need to write the ending of our own stories in life. There are lots of different opinions about the best way to live your life; we all have a big story that explains for us what life is about. Some people make earning money their goal. Their story says that being rich is the way to be happy and to live life to the full. Some people want to be famous. Their aim is to be on the front pages of the magazines, to be celebrated for being a celebrity. Others go after power. If they are in charge, then they can write the story of their lives exactly as they want it to be.*

Hang up the poster board that says "Story" on the wall right behind you so everyone can see it; then continue teaching, saying something like:



But what if there was another story? What if someone had already written out the beginning of the story, and you just had to find your place in it? What if you could see what life was all about, how it began, how it's developed, why things have gone wrong, and how they can be sorted out? What if we could learn from everyone else's mistakes? What if we could get some advice from the designer of life itself?

The Bible may seem like an ancient and out-of-date book. Some Bibles are just text, have strange columns, weirdly thin paper, and no pictures. What if the Bible—the text of God's big story—can help us understand our own stories?

Have teens form new pairs (with people who weren't in their acting team), and give each pair a pen and at least six sticky notes. Invite pairs to discuss these questions:

- What are the most common opinions out there in our culture about the Bible? What are some of the positive opinions? What are some of the negative opinions?
- What different opinions about the Bible do people have at your school? in your family?

Direct pairs to work together to write at least six different opinions about the Bible on their ten sticky notes, each starting with the words "The Bible is..." Challenge them to write realistic opinions—perhaps things they've actually heard other people say. Also encourage them to try to cover a wide spectrum of opinions, from positive to neutral to negative.

Once pairs have written their six opinions, have them exchange what they've written with another pair.

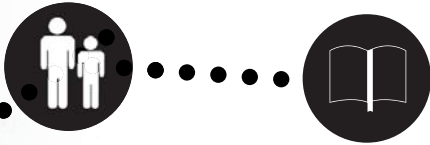
Designate a wall in your meeting space as an opinion spectrum. Point out that one end of the wall is for negative opinions, the opposite end is for positive opinions, and the middle is for neutral or lukewarm opinions. Instruct pairs to stick each of their opinion sticky notes on the wall wherever they think is most appropriate.

Invite everyone to read the various sticky notes on the wall, and then ask:

- Which opinions stand out to you most? Why?

- Which opinions do you most strongly agree with or disagree with? Why?

Say something like: *Let's look at how the Bible describes itself.*



Invite a student to read aloud 2 Timothy 3:16-17, and then ask the group:

- How do these ideas compare with what's on our opinion wall?
- Do you think most people would agree or disagree with the ideas in 2 Timothy 3:16-17? Explain.

Explain to the group that Christians believe the secret of life is in the Bible. They believe that this ancient book is true and that they should base their lives on it. Tell the group that over the next several weeks, you'll explore together what the Bible is all about and how it relates to us. Let them know that you're not going to tell them what to believe about the Bible or about God, but rather that you want to help them understand what the Bible is all about so they can each make up their own mind about it.

## Respond to the Story

(about 15 minutes)

Play some ambient music in the background as you pass around the bag (or bowl) containing strips from the "Characters" handout. Invite everyone to take three or four strips from the bag. Explain that the names on the strips are names of people in the Bible—people they might have heard about and people who may be new to them. Say something like: *These are people in the Bible who are part of God's story. How are they like you? How are they different?*

Invite them to spend some time reading the strips they've received and then, using small pieces of tape, add them to the wall of sticky notes. Prompt teenagers to read some of the character names and descriptions that the others are adding to the wall.

Then ask teenagers to think about how they fit into God's story. Set out several more pads of sticky notes and pens by the wall, and direct teenagers to take sticky notes and write their thoughts about the Bible and God's story. Invite them to consider how they feel at the start of this study series. What are their expectations? Can they see any links between themselves and the characters on the wall? What questions do they have about the Bible? What do they want to say to God about the Bible? Encourage them to approach this freely, writing whatever they'd like in response to what you've discussed so far.

Direct teens to stick their sticky notes on the wall as a way of saying they're up for exploring the big story of the Bible and discovering what it can mean in their own lives.

After adequate time for teenagers to think, read, and write, wrap up the meeting with a short prayer. Pass out the "Story" take-home handouts, one per student. Invite teenagers to set aside about 15 minutes (or more) during the week to explore the story more deeply on their own using the handout. Explain that they each can tape the handout into a notebook that can serve as an exploration journal throughout the series. They can use their exploration journals as their own personal space for writing down their questions and thoughts.

**TIP**

Each week you'll pass out a take-home handout that will guide teenagers in personal reflection and journaling during the week. If you can, purchase some spiral-bound notebooks or blank books that your teenagers can use as their journals during this series.

## Key Passage

"All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work."

- 2 Timothy 3:16-17

**This Key Passage can help teenagers grasp the main idea of the study. You can use it in different ways, such as**

- **writing it on a poster and hanging the poster up in your meeting space,**
- **projecting it on a screen,**
- **inviting teenagers to write it on blank business cards that they can keep in their wallets or pockets,**
- **prompting teenagers to write it on sticky notes and stick the notes on their mirrors or nightstands at home, or**
- **challenging teenagers to memorize it on their own during the week.**